ST. CUTHBERT'S

R. E. KNOWLES

Mrs Osborne

Dec 25 — 1915

Merry Christmas
to Mamma
from Mabel

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ST. CUTHBERT'S

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A NOVEL

ROBERT E. KNOWLES

New York Chicago Toronto
FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY
London and Edinburgh

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First Edition, September, 1905.
Second Edition, October, 1905.
Third Edition, October 15, 1905.
Fourth Edition, November 1905.

New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 80 Wabash Avenue
Toronto: 27 Richmond Street, W.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 100 Princes Street

To
The Canadian Pilgrim
Fathers

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ST. CUTHBERT'S

I

The TURN of The TIDE

"IF you don't get the call you needn't come back here," said my wife to me as I stood upon the door-sill, bag in hand, and my hard-bought ticket in my pocket.

"Well, dear one, I would be sure of it if they could only see the perquisite that goes along with me."

"You must be more serious, Tom, if you expect great calls; but come inside a minute till I say good-bye. When you brought me first to Canada we had half a dozen good-byes to every one farewell. Good-bye again, and if they don't call you they will deserve what they lose."

Thus spoke my wife, and thus was I despatched on the mission that was big with moment.

It was a wondrous hour that brought to us the invitation which I was now proceeding to accept. Not that we were unhappy because our salary was small; we had not lived by bread alone, and our souls

were well content. But my wife had delirious visions, which she affirmed were sane and reasonable, of her husband's coming yet into his own, and indulged every now and then in savage and delicious little declarations of the great misfit, which misfit was in my being the minister of a little church which afforded a little salary and provoked a little fame.

Her other days had been spent in luxury and amid the refinement and the pleasures which money only can provide. And when, our wedding day drawing near apace, I sent her my budget letter, bitterly revealing impecunious facts at which I had before but darkly hinted, and warning her of all the sacrifice which lay beyond, she replied with vehement repudiation of any fears, and in that hour made me rich.

"Cheese and kisses," wrote she, "are considered good fare in my South land for all who have other resources in their hearts." And I mentally averred that half of that would be enough for me.

And so we went ahead—oh, progressive step! And we were never poor again.

But there came a more heroic hour. It was hard, so hard to do, but the pressure rendered concealment quite impossible, for the note I had endorsed was handed in for suit. So I told her one twilight hour that our already limited income must be shared with

an unromantic creditor. There was a little tightening of the lips, then of the arms, then of those mutual heart cords entangled in their eternal root.

We were boarding then, three rooms in a family hotel, and when I returned next day at evening I found everything—books, furniture, piano—all moved to a room upon the topmost story. I was directed thither by the smiling landlord, more enlightened than I, and I entered with furtive misgivings in my soul and with visions of that spacious Southern home before my rueful eyes.

But she was there, radiant and triumphant, still flushed with exercise of hand and heart, viewing proudly her proof of a new axiom that two or more bodies may occupy the same space at the selfsame time.

"I am so glad you didn't come before," she said. "I wanted to be all settled before you saw it. This is just as good as we had before, and only half the price. Isn't it cozy? And everything just fits. And we are away from all the noise. And look at that lovely view. And now we can pay off that horrid note. Aren't you glad?"

"But, Emmeline, my heart breaks to see you caged like this. It is noble of you, just like you, but I cannot forgive myself that I have brought you to this," said I, my voice trembling with pain and joy.

"Why, dear one, how can you speak like that? We have everything here, and each other too, and we shall be caged together."

I kissed that girlish face again and blessed the gift of heaven, murmuring only, in tones that could not be heard, "He setteth the solitary in families," and as we went down together I wondered if that sudden elevation had not brought us nearer heaven than we had been below.

It was largely owing to this lion-hearted courage that I now found myself swiftly borne towards the vacant pulpit which yawned in stately expectation of its weekly candidate.

The invitation "to conduct divine services in St. Cuthbert's, whose pulpit is now vacant," had come unsought from the kirk session of that distant temple.

St. Cuthbert's was the stately cathedral of all adjoining Presbyterianism. It was the pride and crown of a town which stood in prosperous contentment upon the verge of cityhood. Its history was great and honourable; its traditions warlike and evangelical; its people intelligent and intense. Its vast area was famed for its throng of acute and reflective hearers, almost every man of whom was a sermon taster, while its officers were the acknowledged possessors of letters patent to the true ecclesiastical no-

bility. In my student days, medals and scholarships were never quoted among the trophies of our divinity men if it could be justly said of any one that he had preached twice before the hard heads of St. Cuthbert's. This triumph was recited with the same reverent air as when men used to say, "He preached before the Queen."

Some hundreds of miles must be traversed before I reached the place, but only some four-and-twenty hours before I reached the time, of my trial sermons. Therefore did I convert my car into a study and my unsteady knee into a desk, giving myself to the rehearsal of those discourses by which I was to stand or fall. Every weak hand thereof I laboured to strengthen, and every feeble knee I endeavoured to confirm. And what motley hours were those I spent on that fast-flying train! All my reflections tended to devotion, but yet my errand was throbbing with ambition.

Whereupon I fell into a strange and not unprofitable reverie, painfully striving to separate my thoughts, the sheep from the goats, and to reconcile them the one to the other. I knew well enough the human frame to be persuaded that ambition could not altogether be cast out from the spirit of a man, which led me to reflect upon its possible place and purpose if controlled by a master hand beyond the

hand of time. I strove to discover my inmost motive, far behind all other aims, and consoled myself with the hope that God might make it the dominant and sovereign one, to which all others might be unconscious ministers, even as all other lesser ones obey the driving wheel.

I somehow felt that the vision of that radiant face at home, for whom ambition sprung like a fountain, was in no wise inconsistent with the holiest work which awaited me on the morrow.

At thought of her, my ambition, earth-born though it was, seemed to be robed in white and to be unashamedly ministering unto God. And I was fain to believe at last that this very hope of a larger place was from Himself, and that He was the shepherd of the sheep and of the goats alike. Whereupon I fell upon my sermons afresh with a clearer conscience, which means a stronger mind, and swiftly prayed, even while I worked, that the Lord of the harvest would winnow my tumultuous thoughts, garnering the wheat unto Himself and burning the tares with unquenchable fire.

Onward rushed the hours, and onward rolled the train in its desperate struggle with them, till the setting sun, victorous over both, reminded me that I would be in New Jedboro before the dusk deepened into dark. Then restored I my sermon notes, re-

burnished and repaired, to the trusty keeping of my well-worn valise, settling myself for one of those delicious baths of thought to be truly enjoyed only on the farther side of toil.

I had but well begun to compose my mind and to forecast the probable experiences of the morrow, when a rich Scotch voice broke in upon me with the unmistakable inquiry, "And where micht ye be gaein?"

I responded with the name of New Jedboro, assuming the air of a man who was bent only upon a welcome visit to long-separated friends. But I had reckoned without my host. My interrogator was a Scot, with the Scot's incurable curiosity, always to be estimated by the indifference of his air. If his face be eloquent of profound unconcern, then may you know that a fever of inquisitiveness is burning at his heart.

My questioner seemed to scarcely listen for my answer, yet a tutored eye could tell that he was camping on my trail.

His next interrogation was launched with courteous composure: "Ye'll no' be the man wha's expeckit in St. Cuthbert's ower the Sabbath?"

I now saw that this was no diluted Scotsman. Bred on Canadian soil, he was yet original and pure. He had struck the native Scottish note, the ecclesias-

tical. Like all his countrymen, he had a native taste for a minister. His instincts were towards the Kirk, and for all things akin to Psalm or Presbytery he intuitively took the scent. I have maintained to this day that he sniffed my sermons from afar, undeceived by the worldly flavour of my rusty bag.

I collected myself heroically, and replied that I was looking forward to the discharge of the high duty to which he had referred. Upon this admission he moved nearer, as a great lawyer stalks his quarry in the witness box. He eyed me solemnly for a moment, with the look of one taking aim, and then said slowly —

"I'm no' an elder in that kirk."

"Are you not?" said I, with as generous an intonation of surprise as conscience would permit.

"I'm no' an elder," he repeated. "But I gang till it," he added.

Then followed a pause, which I dared to break with the remark, "I am told it is a spacious edifice."

He merely glanced at me, as if to say that all irrelevant conversation was out of place, and then continued —

"And I'm no' the precentor; I'm no' the man, ye ken, that lifts the tune."

I nodded sympathetically, trying to convey my sense of the mistake the congregation had made in its choice of both elders and precentor.

"Ye wud say, to luik at me, that I'm no' an office-seeker, an' ye're richt. But I haud an office for a' that."

This time I smiled as if light had come to me, and as one who has been reassured in his belief in an overruling Providence.

"What office do you hold?" said I.

"Ye wudna guess in a twalmonth. I'm no' the treasurer, as ye're thinkin'—I'm the beadle."

I uttered a brief eulogy upon the honour and responsibility of that position, pointing out that the beadle had a dignity all his own, as well as the elders and other officers of the kirk.

He endorsed my views with swift complacent nods.

"That's what I aye think o' when I see the elders on the Sabbath mornin'," said he; "forbye, there's severals o' *them*, but wha ever heard tell o' mair than ae beadle? And what's mair, I had raither be a door-keeper in the Lord's hoose than dwall in tents o' sin. Them's Dauvit's words, and they aye come to me when I compare mysel' wi' the elders."

I hurriedly commended his reference to the Scriptures, at the same time avoiding any share in his

rather significant classification, remarking on the other hand that elders had their place, and that authority was indispensable in all churches, and the very essence of the Presbyterian system.

He interrupted me, fearing he had been misunderstood.

"Mind ye," he declared fervently, "I'm no' settin' mysel' up even wi' the minister. I regard him as mair important than me—far mair important," he affirmed, with reckless humility, "but the elders, they are juist common fowk like mysel'. An' at times they are mair than common. Me an' the minister bear a deal frae the elders. He aye bids me to bear wi' them, an' I aye bid him no' to mind. I tell him whiles that we'd meet an' we'd greet whaur the elders cease frae troublin'—them's the poet's words."

We were now some two miles or so from the town and the church wherein he exercised his gifts and magnified his office; and my rugged friend, dismissing the elders for the time, reverted to the inquiry he had seen fit previously to ignore.

"Ye were askin' me aboot the kirk."

"Yes," said I in a chastened voice, "I asked you if it was not very large."

"Thae was no' yir exact words, but I ken yir meanin'. It's a gran' kirk, St. Cuthbert's, an' ye'll

need to speak oot—no' to yell, ye ken, for I'm nigh deefened wi' the roarin' o' the candidates sin' oor kirk was preached vacant by the Presbytery. Dinna be ower lang; and be sure to read a' the psalm afore ye sit doon, and hae the sough o' Sinai in yir discoorse, specially at the mornin' diet; an' aye back up the Scriptures wi' the catechism, an' hae a word or twa aboot the Covenanters, them as sealed their testimony wi' their bluid, ye ken. Ye'll tak' ma advice as kindly; it's mair than likely we'll never meet again gin the morrow's gone."

I thanked him for his counsel and reached for my bag, at the signal of escaping steam.

The car door had just closed behind me when I felt a hand upon my arm and heard a now familiar voice —

"An' dinna pray ower muckle for yir ain devoted folk at hame; an' dinna ask the King an' Head o' the Kirk to fetch till us a wise under-shepherd o' the flock."

With a word of additional acknowledgment I stepped on to the station platform, but my parley with a burly cabman was interrupted by the same voice whispering in my ear —

"Ye micht mind the elders in yir prayer; gin they were led mair into the licht it wad dae nae harm to onybody."

II

A MAN With a SECRET

THERE was no one about the station to welcome me and none to direct, but there were many to stare and wonder.

The moderator of the vacant kirk had provided me with the address of the house to which he said I should repair. I was in no wise mortified by this apparent lack of hospitality, for the aforesaid moderator had reminded me in his postscript that the folk of St. Cuthbert's were notoriously Scotch, untrained to any degree of devotion at the beginning, but famous for the fervour of their loyalty at the close of their ministers' careers.

Whether or not I should have any career at all amongst them was the subject of my thoughts as I wended my way to "Inglewood," for such was the melodious title of the house which was to be my home during my sojourn in New Jedboro.

Beautiful for situation it proved to be, nestling among its sentinels of oak, upon the highest hill of seven which garrisoned the town. The signs of wealth and good taste were everywhere about, and my probationer's heart was beating fast when I

pulled the polished silver knob whose patrician splendour had survived the invasion of all electrical upstarts.

I heard the answering bell far within, breaking again and again into its startled cry, and my soul answered it with peals of such humiliation as is known only to the man whose heart affords a home to that ill-matched pair, the discomfiture of the candidate and the pride of the Presbyterian.

The door was opened by the master of the house, Michael Blake, a man of forty-five or so, the wealthy senior of New Jedboro's greatest manufacturing firm.

I suppose he looked first at me, but my first sensation was of his keen eye swiftly falling on the shabby travelling-bag in my left hand, my right kept disengaged for any friendly overture which might await me.

Oh, the shame and the anguish of those swift glances towards one's travelling-bag! Can no kind genius devise a scheme for their temporary concealment such as the modern book agent has brought to its perfection, full armed beneath the treacherous shelter of his cloak?

I broke the silence: "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Blake?"

"Yes, that is my name," responded a rich, soulful

voice, resonant with the finest Scottish flavour, "and what can I do for you, sir?"

Presuming that it would be hardly delicate for me to state the particular duty I was expecting him to discharge, I betook myself to the association of ideas, and replied—

"I am to preach in St. Cuthbert's to-morrow," hoping that this might suggest to him the information he had sought.

Swift and beautiful was the transformation. The soul of hospitality leaped from his face, stern and secretive though it was. His eye, which had seemed to hold my blushing bag at bay, turned now upon me with all the music of a great welcome in its glance. He looked at me with that frank abruptness which true cordiality creates, and when he took my hand in his my heart leaped to the warm shelter of its grasp.

"I have been looking for you; you are welcome here," he said, in the quietest of tones. He drew me gently within the massive door, and in that moment I knew that I was in the custody of love.

A grandfather's clock, proud and stately in its sense of venerable faithfulness, was gravely ticking off the moments with hospitality in its tone. A pleasant-faced lassie showed me to my room, reminding me that the evening meal awaited my descent.

My host justified my every impression. While we disposed of the plain but appetizing fare, whose crown was the speckled trout which his skill had lured from home, he submitted me to the kindliest of cross-examinations concerning my past, my scholarship, my evangelical positions, my household, and much else that nestled among them all. Throughout, I felt the charm and the power of his gentleness, and under its secret influence I yielded up what many another would have sought in vain. Some natures there are which search you as the sun lays bare the flowers, making for itself a pathway to their inmost heart, every petal opening before its siege of love.

But reciprocity there was none. His lips seemed to stand like inexorable sentinels before his heart, in league with its great secret, the guardians of a past which no man had heard revealed. One or two tentative attempts to discover his antecedents were foiled by his charming taciturnity.

"I came from the old country many years ago," was the only information he vouchsafed me.

The evening was spent in conversation which never flamed but never flagged. My increasing opportunity for observation served but to confirm my conviction that I was confronted with a man who had one great and separate secret hidden within the impenetrable recesses of a contrite heart. He said little about St.

Cuthbert's or the morrow, his most significant observation being to the effect that the serious-minded of the kirk were looking forward to my appearance with hopeful interest.

After he had bidden me good-night, he again sought me in my chamber, interrupting the devotions which I was striving to conduct in oblivion of to-morrow and in the sombre light of the Judgment Day.

"Will you do me a kindness in the kirk to-morrow?" he said, with almost pathetic eagerness.

I responded fervently that nothing could be a greater kindness to myself than the sense of one bestowed on him.

"Very well, then, will you give us the Fifty-first Psalm to sing at the morning service—it always seems to me that it is the soul's staple food; and let us begin with the fifth verse—

> "'Behold, Thou in the inward parts
> With truth delighted art.'

It falls like water on the thirsty heart. And perhaps, if your previous selection will permit, you would give us in the evening the paraphrase—

> "'Come let us to the Lord our God
> With contrite hearts return.'

My mother first taught me that," he added, with

the first quiver of the lip I yet had seen, "and I have learned it anew from God."

He then swiftly departed, little knowing that he had given me that night a pillow for both head and heart. I fell asleep, his great quotations and his earnest words flowing about my soul even as the ocean laves the shore.

III

OUR MUTUAL TRIAL

THE Sabbath morning broke serene and fair. Thus also awoke my spirit, still invigorated by its contact with one I felt to be an honest and God-fearing man, whose ardour I knew was chastened by a long-waged conflict of the soul.

"Our morning worship was led by Mr. Blake himself, who besought the Divine blessing upon the labours of him who was "for this day 'our servant for Jesus' sake.'"

We walked to the church together, mingling with the silent and reverent multitude pressing towards a common shrine.

As he left me at the vestry door, he said earnestly—

"Forget that you are a candidate of St. Cuthbert's, and remember that you are a minister of God."

The beadle recognized me with a confidential nod, inspected the pulpit robe which I had donned, and taking up the "Books," he led the way to the pulpit steps with an air which might have provoked the envy of the most solemn mace-bearer who ever served his king.

He opened the door, and then there appeared to my wondering view a sea of expectant faces, vast beyond my utmost dream. They were steeped in silence, a silence so intense that it left the impress on my mind of an ocean, majestic in its heaving grandeur; for the stiller you find the sea of human faces the more reasonably may you dread the trough of human waves.

The wonder of the reverent and the sneer of the scornful have alike been prompted by the preaching of a candidate. Something strange and incongruous seems to pertain to the performance of a man whose acknowledged purpose is the dual one of winning alike the souls and the smiles of men. He seeks, as all preachers are supposed to do, the uplift of his hearers' souls, while his very appearance is a pledge of his desire to so commend himself as to be their favourite and their choice. Much hath been written, and more hath been said, of the humiliation to which he must submit who occupies a vacant pulpit as the applicant for a vacant kirk.

But, whatever ground there be for these reflections, I felt the force of none of them that radiant Sabbath morning in St. Cuthbert's. My Calvinism, which is regarded by those who know it not as dragonlike and altogether drastic, proved now my comfort and my stay, and within its vast pavilion I seemed to

hide as in the covert of the Eternal. For there surged through heart and brain the stately thought that such experimental dealings between a minister and a people might be sublimated before reverent eyes, hallowed as a holy venture, and destined to play its part in the economy of God.

His claim seemed loftier far than any obligation between my heart and man, and so uplifted was I by the sense of a commission which even candidature could neither invalidate nor deform, that all sense of servility, all cringing thought of livelihood, all fear of faltering and all faltering of fear, seemed to flee away even as the blasphemy of darkness retreats before the sanctities of the morn. In very truth I forgot that I was a candidate of St. Cuthbert's and seemed but to remember that I was a minister of God.

Whether my sermon was good or ill I could not then have told; but I could well have told that a victorious secret is to him who strives after earnestness of heart, unvexed by the clamour of his own rebellious and ambitious soul.

The congregation was vast and reverent as befitted the purpose of the hour; the most careless eye could mark the strong and reflective cast of those Scottish faces, whose native adamant was but little softened by their sojourn beneath Canadian

skies. Reverence seemed to clothe these worshippers like a garment. They were as men who believed in God, whereby are men most fearsome and yet most glorious to look upon. It was the fearsomeness of such a face, garrisoned in God, which had beat back the haughty gaze of Mary when she met the eye of Knox, burning with a fire which no torch of time had kindled.

And when they sang their opening hymn, they seemed to stride upwards as mountaineers, for they lifted up their eyes as men who would cast them down again only before God Himself. From word to word they climbed, and from line to line, as though each word or line were some abutting crag of the very hill of God. Besides, the psalm they sung was this —

> "I to the hills will lift mine eyes
> From whence doth come mine aid."

Their intensity steadied my very soul. They seemed to look at me as if to say, "We are in earnest if you are; our kirk is vacant but our hearts are full," and the pulpit in which I stood, and in which many a hapless man had stood before, was hallowed by its solemn garrison of waiting souls, and redeemed of all taint of treason towards its sacred trust.

When I called them unto prayer, they answered as

the forest answers when the wind brings it word from heaven, save some venerable few who rose erect (as was their fathers' way), standing like sentinel oaks amid lesser trees, they also bending with an obeisance prompted from within. It seemed not hard to lead these earnest hearts in prayer—they seemed the rather to lead my soul as by a more familiar path; or, to state the truth more utterly, their devoutness seemed to bear me on, as the deep ocean bears itself and its every burden towards the shore.

This intensity of worship pervaded its every act. They joined in the reading of the Word as those who must both hear and see it for themselves, their books opening and closing in unison with the larger one which decked their pulpit like a crown.

Even when the collection was taken up they maintained their loftiness of poise. It had been often told me that Scotch folk contribute to an offering with the same heroism wherewith their ancestors opened their unshrinking veins, doling forth their money, like their blood, with a martyr's air. But although I remarked that some Scottish eyes followed their departing coins with glances of parental tenderness, there was yet a solemn stateliness about the operation which greatly won me, even those who dedicated the homeliest copper doing it unbashedly, as if to the Lord, and not unto men.

We closed with the penitential psalm which Mr. Blake had asked, and its great words seemed charged with the strong reality of men who believed in sin with the same old-fashioned earnestness as marked their faith in God, the two answering the one to the other as deep calleth unto deep, eternally harmonious as they are.

The congregation swayed slowly down the aisle, Scottishly cold and still, like the processional of the ice in the spring-time. They reminded me of noble bergs drifting through the Straits of Belle Isle. It was a Presbyterian flood, and every man a floe. But I suspected mightily that they were nevertheless the product of the spring, and somehow felt that they dwelt near the confines of the summer. The fire which warmed their hearts had touched my own, and in that very moment wherein they turned their backs upon me, I pursued them with surrendering tenderness, and coveted for my own the rugged faithfulness which hath now enriched these many golden years.

One or two turned to glance at me, but when their gaze met mine they despatched their eyes on some impartial quest, as if caressing their noble church or looking for some lingering friend.

The precentor, whose place was in a kind of songster's pulpit just below me, was wreathed in the complacent air of a man who has discharged a lofty

duty and has done it well. He had borne himself throughout as the real master of the entire service, and as one who had ruled from an untitled throne. He cast me one or two swift glances, such as would become an engineer who had brought his train or a pilot who had brought his ship to the desired haven. I returned his overture with a look of humble gratitude, and he thereupon relaxed as one well content with what was his hard-earned due, but nothing more. I have well learned since then that by so much as one values one's peace, by that much must one reverence the precentor.

When I regained the vestry I found it peopled with six or seven elders (a great and sweltering population), but no word of favour or approval escaped a single Scottish lip. Their hour had not yet come; but I knew it not, and was proportionately cast down by what seemed to me a silent rhetoric of scorn. But it was the will of heaven to somewhat set aside what I unknowingly estimated to be the verdict of indifference. The beadle, as one with whom I had had a past, beckoned me without, whispering that a "wumman body," a stranger, desired to speak with me in an adjoining room.

Her story was short and sad; her request, the sobbing entreaty of a broken heart that I would pray for her darling and her prodigal, her first-born, wan-

dering in that farthest of all countries which lies beyond the confines of a mother's ken. I answered her with a glance which owned the kinship of her tears, and pledged it with a hand which, thank God, has ever found its warmest welcome in the hand of woe. Then I went back to the vestry unafraid. "For what," thought I, "can these elders do either for me or against me, if I am really a priest unto God for one mother's son? This woman has evidently forgotten that I am a candidate of St. Cuthbert's, and has remembered only that I am a minister of God."

IV

OUR MUTUAL VERDICT

THE evening service was like unto that of the morning, the only difference being that I saw this sturdy folk, mountain-like, in the light of the setting, instead of the rising sun. But still no word or hint revealed to me the favour or disfavour with which my efforts had been received by the people of St. Cuthbert's, save only that one man ventured to remark that I had brought him in mind of Thomas Chalmers.

I hurriedly exclaimed, "Is that so?" in a tone which all too plainly implored him to go on.

"Yes," said he. "When ye blawed yir nose, if ma een had been shut, I cud hae swore it was Chammers," whereupon the last state of me was worse than the first.

But I was a little comforted in overhearing one Scot say to another as they passed me on their homeward way, "He's no' to be expeckit to preach like yon man frae Hawick," to which the other replied, and I caught his closing words, "But there was a bit at the end that wasna bad."

This was but a thin gruel to satisfy one's wonder-

ing soul, but it was shortly thickened by the beadle. He was waiting for us at Mr. Blake's, wishing instruction about some task that fell within his duties, but he managed to have a word with me —

"I canna tell what waits ye, but, gin ye'd like to see through the manse, I'll tak' ye through the morn."

I thanked him, declining, but secretly blessed him and inwardly rejoiced.

At worship that night my gentle host read the story of the prodigal, and when we knelt to pray he repeated twice, "I will arise and go unto my Father," and in the pause I felt that the wave of some besetting memory was beating on the shore; more and more was it borne in upon me that this man had a past, shared only by himself and God and some one else unknown.

The morning witnessed my departure from New Jedboro, and from the window of the train I watched its fast-retreating hills, so often trodden by me since with the swinging stride of joy, or clambered with the heavy step of care.

There is neither time nor space to set down in detail all that followed. Let it suffice to say that while they were musing the fire burned, and the good folk of St. Cuthbert's slowly and solemnly resolved to call me to their ancient church.

They were scandalized by a report, which spread with pestilential ease, that I had known my wife but three short weeks when I asked her to walk the long walk with me. This and other rumours provoked them to despatch a sage and ponderous officer to the distant scene of my labours, that he might investigate them on the spot. He came, he saw, he was conquered. My wife lassoed him at a throw. He went home in fetters, his eloquence alone unloosed. Long before the night on which they should meet to call, he had brandished his opinion as to the wisdom of my delirious haste.

"But did he mak' his choice so redeek'lus sudden?" he was asked.

"I dinna ken," he answered tropically, "and I dinna care. If he bided three weeks, he bided ower lang. I kent that fine when ance I saw her. Noo, I pit it till ye, gin ye were crossin' a desert place, an' ye saw the Rose o' Sharon afore ye, wad ye no' pluck it gin ye micht, and pluck it quick? I pit it till ye." And they answered him not a word, for there is no debater like the heart.

I was told in after days that my historic friend the beadle canvassed for me night and day, laying mighty stress upon the fact that he knew me well, since he had travelled with me, assuring every ear that I was "uncommon ceevil," and proudly laying bare the in-

dependent scorn with which I had met his proposition to inspect the manse.

"But we micht get him yet," he concluded, "gin we gang richt aboot it."

These testimonials, together with his plaintive appeal to be relieved of the responsibility which the absence of a fixed minister threw upon himself, went far to confirm the wavering.

Nor shall I linger to trace the workings of that ponderous machinery whereby I was at last installed as the minister of St. Cuthbert's Church. Even the great assemblage which gathered to welcome us, with its infinite introductions, its features social, devotional, and deputational, its addresses civic and ecclesiastical, must be dismissed with a word.

It reminded me of nothing so much as of the launching of a ship, and beneath all its tumult of artillery there thrummed the deep undertone of joy. For St. Cuthbert's, contrary to its historic way, had parted with its last minister, a man of great ability, amid the smoke of battle, and he had gone forth as Napoleon went, with a martial record which the corroding years even yet have scarcely tarnished. Fierce had been the fight, the factions grimly equal, and beclouded with a sublime confusion as to which side had been led by heaven and which by Belial. On this point, even now, they do not exactly see eye to eye.

And this deep joy, whose untiring hum (joy's native voice) had entwined itself with every exercise of our exultant gathering was born of the assurance of returning harmony and the welcome calm which follows the departing storm. The gentle vines of peace were beginning to clothe their scarred and disfigured Zion.

St. Cuthbert's hailed that night as the hour of its convalescence. In consequence, every speech, even those from dry and desiccated lips, was coloured with the melody of hope. Even hoary jokes and ancestral stories, kept for tea-meetings as hard tack is kept for the army and navy, were disinfected by the kindly flavour which brooded like an April cloud.

And now it is my purpose to set down as best I may some of the features of my life, and a few of my most vivid observations among these remarkable folk.

The greater number of them had been born in bonnie Scotland, and all of them, even those who had never seen their ancestral home, spoke and lived and thought as though they had just come from the heathery hills. They were sprung from the loins of heroes, the stalwart pioneers from Roxburghshire and Ayrshire and Dumfries, and many another noble spot whose noblest sons had gone forth to earth's remotest bound, flaming with love of liberty and God.

Seventy years before they had settled about New Jedboro, thinking of the well-loved Scottish town whose name it bore.

Soon the echoing forest bowed before their gleaming axes, and they made the wilderness to blossom like the rose. Comfort, and even wealth, came to them at the imperious beck of industry. Stern and earnest, reckoning frivolity a sin, finding their pleasure in a growing capacity for self-denial and a growing scorn of needless luxury, they cherished in their blood the iron which had been bequeathed by noble sires.

Hand in hand with God like sons of Knox, they built the school and the church with the first-fruits of their toil, disporting themselves again in their unforgotten psalms, worshipping after the dear-bought manner of their fathers, not a few of whom had paid the price of blood, nor deemed it sacrifice.

Like draws to like, they say. With St. Cuthbert's this had certainly been the case; for every minister who had served them heretofore had been both born and educated in their motherland.

Three had they had. The first was the Reverend John Grant, Doctor of Divinity, from Greenock; the second, the Reverend James Kay, from Aberdeen; the third, my immediate predecessor, the Reverend Henry Alexander from Glasgow.

Like a mountain peak towered the memory of their first minister, a man of gigantic power, scholarly and profound, grimly genial, carrying with him everywhere the air of the Eternal. He was as eloquent almost as human lips can be, magnetic to the point of tyranny, and grandly independent of everything and every one but God. His fame covered Canada like a flood. American colleges sought the honour of their laurel on his brow, and from one of the best he accepted his Doctor's hood. City congregations coveted him with pious envy, but he hearkened to few and coquetted with none. He had assumed the cure of St. Cuthbert's when it was almost entirely (as it was still considerably) a country congregation, revelling in solitude and souls, both of which were nearer here to Nature's heart than amid the sweltering throng. Here he cherished his mighty heart and gave eternal bent to hearts only less mighty than his own.

> "Remote from towns he ran his godly race,
> Nor e'er had changed nor wished to change his place."

Throughout my ministry in St. Cuthbert's the mention of his name was the signal for a cloud of witnesses. Forty years had elapsed since the countryside followed him to his grave, shrouded in gown and bands, a regalia more than royal to their loving

eyes. But they had guarded his memory with the vigilance which belongs only to the broken heart, and the traditions of his greatness were fresh among them still.

"I likit the ither twa fine," said a shrewd sermon taster to me soon after my arrival, "but their sermons didna plough the soul like the Doctor's; we hae na had the fallow grun' turned up sin' he dee'd."

And so said, or thought, they all.

V

My KIRK SESSION

HE would need a brave and facile pen who would venture to portray the kirk session of St. Cuthbert's Church. For any kirk session is far from commonplace, let alone the session of such a church as mine. Kirk sessions are the bloom of Scottish character in particular and the crown and glory of mankind in general. Piety, sobriety, severity, these are the three outstanding graces which they illustrate supremely; but interlocked with these are many other gifts and virtues in varying degrees of culture.

In St. Cuthbert's, the pride of eldership was chiefly vested in their wives and daughters.

"Ye mauna be ower uplifted aboot yir faither's office," was the oft-repeated admonition of the elder's wife to the elder's children, and the children were not slow to remark that her words were one part rebuke and ten parts pride. For to mothers and bairns alike he appeared as one of God's kings and priests when he walked down the aisle with the vessels of the Lord.

Many of these men were poor, grandly and

pathetically poor, but none was poor enough to appear at the sacramental board without his "blacks," radiant with the lustre of open love and sacred sacrifice. This I afterwards learned was their wives' doing, and marvellous in my eyes. Ah me! How many a decently apparelled husband, how many a white-robed child, has come forth out of great tribulation not their own. Indeed, uncounted multitudes there are who shall walk in white before the throne of God, whose robes the secret sacrifice of loving hearts hath whitened as no fuller of earth can whiten them.

My first meeting with the kirk session of St. Cuthbert's was an epoch-marking incident. Twenty-eight there were who sat about the session-room, every man but one an importation from Caledonia's rugged hills. Roxburgh's covenanting heroes, Wigtonshire's triumphant martyrs, Dumfriesshire and her Cameronians, with their great namesake's lion heart; Ayrshire, with her bloody memories of moor and moss-hags, of quarry and conventicle, of Laud and liberty—all these had filtered through and reappeared in these silent and stalwart men.

Of these eight-and-twenty faces at least one score had the cast of marble and the stamp of eternity upon them. I felt like a hillock nestling at the feet of lofty peaks, for I do make my oath that when you are

begirt by men in whose veins there flows the blood of martyrs, who have been slowly nurtured upon such stately doctrines as are their daily food, who actually believe in God as a living participator in the affairs of time, whose mental pabulum has been Thomas Boston and Samuel Rutherford and Philip Doddridge, and who have used these worthies but as helps to climb that unpinnacled hill of the Eternal Word—when you get such men as these, multiplied a hundredfold by the stern consciousness of a religious trust, if you are not then among the Rockies of flesh and blood, I am as one who sees men like walking trees, ignorant of the true altitudes of human life.

But I was yet to learn, and to learn by heart (the great medium of all real character), that many a fragrant flower may bloom in secret clefts of rock-bound hills, frowning and forbidding though they be. For God loves to surprise us, especially in happy ways; and His is a sanguine sun.

It should now be stated that I began my ministry in St. Cuthbert's with the handicap of an Irish ancestry. How then was I to wear the hodden gray? Or how was I to commingle myself with that historic tide which I well knew the Scottish heart regarded as fed more than any other from the river that makes glad the city of God?

My every vein was already full to overflowing with Irish blood. My father was from Ballymena and my mother was from Cork, a solution which no chemistry could cure. I was inclined by nature and confirmed by practice towards a reasonable pride in my ancestral land. But odds were against me. Even the mistress of my manse, whose judgment was wont to take counsel of her kindly heart, even she remonstrated when she first discovered my nativity, and has never since been altogether thankful, though she strives hard to be resigned.

"Why do you always flaunt your Irish origin?" she reasoned once. "If it is good stock, be modest about it; and if it is not, the less said the better."

Then she remarked that she was no doubt prejudiced, for she had once witnessed the noble procession in New York on St. Patrick's Day; and she added that they all seemed to have mouths like the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky and complexions like an asphalt pavement under repairs. My wife's power of detecting analogies was uncommonly acute.

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When the session had been duly constituted, the minutes of the last meeting were read by the session clerk. It is probably quite within the mark to say that all ecclesiastical officialdom can produce no other dignitary with the same stern grandeur as pertains to

the clerk of a Scottish session. I have witnessed archbishops in their robes and with their mitres, and have marvelled at the gravity with which they clothed the most ponderous frivolities, at their stately genuflections, at the swift shedding and donning of their bewildering millineries. I have seen General Booth resplendent in his flaming clericals. I have even looked on the bespangled Dowie, dazzling and bedazzled—but none of these has the majesty of poise, the aroma of responsibility, or the inexorable air of authority which mark the true-bred session clerk.

The minutes having been read and hermetically sealed, I addressed the elders briefly, referring to my great duties and my poor abilities, after which I invited them to a general deliberation, and begged them to acquaint me with the mind and temper of the congregation, asking such advice as might be useful in entering upon my labours.

"We bid ye welcome, moderator," began the senior elder, by name Sandy Grant, "an' we'll do what in us lies to haud up yir hands; ye're no' oor servant, but oor minister, and we're a' ready to do yir biddin', gin it's the will o' God. Ye're sittin' in a michty seat, moderator. It was frae that chair that oor first minister spak' till us in far ither days."

At this reference to the golden age, I saw a wave of tenderness break over the faces of the older men.

"Ay, I mind weel the nicht Doctor Grant sat amang us for the first time, as ye're sittin' noo."

This time it was Ronald M'Gregor who had spoken, the love-light on whose face even sixty winters could not disguise.

"We'll never look upon his like again. Ye've mebbe watched the storm, sir, when it beat upon the shore. His style o' delivery was like the ragin' o' the waves. Ye see that buik, moderator, yir haun's restin' on the tap o't. Weel, he dune for sax o' them the while he was oor minister. We bocht the strongest bound o' them, but he banged them to tatters amazin' fast. A page at a skite. Times it was like the driftin' o' the leaves in the fall. He was graun' on the terrors o' the law. We haena been what's to say clean uplifted wi' the michty truth o' the punishment o' the lost sin' his mooth was closed in death," and Ronald sighed the sigh of the hungry heart.

"Div ye no' mind the Doctor on the decrees, the simmer o' the cholera—div ye no' mind yon, Ronald?" said Thomas Laidlaw, swept into the seething tide of reminiscence; but here the session clerk rose to a point of order.

"The members o' this court will address the moderator," he said sternly. "Moreover, we are here for business, not for history. We might well think shame of ourselves, glorifying the old when we

should be welcoming the new. We're no' to be aye dwellin' amang the tombs" (this with a rise in feeling and a drop in language). "Besides, Doctor Grant was no' a common man, and it's no becomin' to be comparin' common men along wi' the likes o' him."

So this, thought I, is the Scottish mode of paying compliments. I had always heard that their little tributes were more medicinal than confectionery.

Then followed a painful calm, for Scottish calms are stormy things.

It was Michael Blake who first resumed.

"Let us forget the things which are behind," he said, "if we only can," and there was a wealth of agony in his words, "and let us press forth unto those things which are before. We greet you, moderator, as the messenger of peace, for we are all but sinful men and unworthy of the trust we hold. I hope you will preach to us the grace of God, for we have learned ourselves the terrors of the law."

"I move that we adjourn," interjected Ronald M'Gregor, alarmed for the retirement of Sinai, and fearful of a too early spring.

"I second that," said a rugged patriarch, hitherto silent.

"But I hope the moderator 'll permit me to express the hope that he'll no' shorten up the services, and that he'll gie the young fowk mair o' the cate-

chism than we hae been gettin', and mak' the sacraments mair searchin' to the soul," said Saunders M'Tavish.

"Ye're oot o' order," interrupted the clerk; "there's a motion to adjourn afore the Chair."

"But I maun tak' ma staun," exclaimed Saunders.

"Ye mauna," retorted the clerk, "ye maun tak' yir seat," and Saunders dropped where he stood, while his fellow-elders looked into each other's faces as if to say that this thing might have befallen any one of them.

VI

The FIRST PARISH ROUND

I SOON began, of course, the visitation of my flock. Although my title to youth was at that time undisputed, and although the unreflective would have labelled me "new school," the importance of faithful visiting was ever before my mind.

The curate's place (unhappiest of men) had more than once been offered me at the hands of portly ministers, prepared to deny themselves all the visiting, they to take all the preaching and nearly all the salary, while their untitled slave was to deny himself the high joy of the pulpit, to starve on the salary's dregs, and to indulge himself royally in a very carnival of unceasing visitation. These overtures I had had little hesitation in declining, for observation had taught me that the slave's place soon makes the slave's spirit, unless that slavery be an indenture unto God, which is but the sterner name for liberty.

Moreover, curates (especially Presbyterian, which implieth the greater perversion) seemed to lack the breath of the uplands which the pulpit breathes, and too often degenerate into society favourites, whose

flapping tails of black may be seen as these curates ring at fashionable doors, where "five-o'clocks" within await the kid-gloved ministers of men who are supposed to be the stewards of eternal life. I had once overheard an enamelled queen of fashion declare, with much emotion, that their curate was indispensable to a high-class "at home," and even panegyrize his graceful transportation of cups of tea, however full.

Whereupon I forever swore that I would frizzle upon no such heathen altar; I vowed to be either a minister or a butler—one thing or the other—but never a Right Reverend Butler, which is a monster and a tongue-cheeked comedy to both God and man.

As the minister of a vast congregation like St. Cuthbert's, I might on the other hand have requested an assistant who should relieve me of the visiting, leaving me only the duties of the pulpit, oceanic enough for any man. Indeed, one of the stalwarts had suggested this to me, averring that I needed more time for my sermons, whereat I looked at him sharply; but his face was placid as a sea of milk, which is the way of Scotsmen when they mean to score. But this dual ministry was ever the object of my disfavour, for he preaches best who visits best, and the weekly garner makes the richest grist for the Sunday mill. True and tender visiting is the ser-

mon's fuse, and what God hath put together no man can safely put asunder.

One of my first visits was to the farmhouse of Donald M'Phatter, a belated member of the fold, for he and his wife Elsie had not beshadowed St. Cuthbert's door for many a year. This parochial policy had been suggested to me by the beadle:

"Ye maun luik to the driftwood first—pit oot the laggin' log frae the shore, ye ken," he said to me, following this up with an exhaustive narrative of the raftsman's life which had once been his.

I found Donald dour but deferential, full-armed against every appeal for his reform.

"I willna gang," he exclaimed, "till ony kirk that pits oot the token[1] at the sacrament, and taks up wi' they bit cairds they're usin' the noo. Cairds at the sacrament! it's fair insultin' to the Almichty."

I parried the blow as best I could, and was on the verge of winning in the argument when he suddenly took another tack.

"Forbye, I hae dune ma duty. Didna I gang steady when the Doctor was oor meenister? Ilka Sabbath day I gaed an' hearkened till the graun' sermons twa oors at a time, an' God grippit me thae days, an' He hasna loosened His haud o' me yet.

[1] A small piece of metal with the words "This do in remembrance of Me," given in Scottish churches, before the Sacrament of The Supper, to those entitled to participate.

Ance saved, aye saved. That's ma doctrine. Wha can slip awa frae grace, forbye it be thae Methody buddies an' ither Armenian fowk, an' there was na ane o' them in the parish in the doctor's day. The fields was fine an' fu' o' wheat thae days, but there's muckle mustard noo, I tell ye that."

"But you will surely admit, Mr. M'Phatter, that the nourishment of years ago will not suffice for to-day. Yesterday's dinner will not forestall the necessity of the day that follows," I urged, inwardly ashamed of the threadbare argument.

He saw its threadbareness too, for he retorted —

"That's a verra auld argyment; in fac', it's clean stale, if it's no' rotten. Doctor Grant wud hae sniffit at it. And what's mair, it's no' an argyment ava', for I hae mony a dinner o' the sermons that I gathered in thae far back days. I aye eat and sup off that when ye an' yir fowk's fummlin' wi' yir cairds at the kirk. Bide a meenit."

He hurried into an adjoining room, and soon returned with a sheaf of rusty notes, clearing his throat awhile with the sound of a trumpeter calling to the fray.

"I wasna ane o' the sleepin' kind; I aye paid attention in the hoose o' God. I only sleepit ance an' I cudna help it, for oor Jeanie was born that mornin' —an' that was a work o' needcessity. An' what's

mair, I aye took notes o' the discoorse, an' I hae them yet.

"They's ma dinners noo, tae use yir word, minister —they's ma dinners, an' they hunger nae mair wha tak's them—saxteen or seventeen coorses, ilka ane o' them; nane o' yir bit lunches wi' napkins an' flowers and finger bowls like ye hae the noo, no' worth the bit grace ye say ower them—they's nane o' yir teas, tastin' an' sniffin', wi' sweeties an' sic like—they's meat, sir, strong meat for strong men, an' the bane's in the baith o' them like."

He stopped, as a cannon stops after it has fired, the aroma of battle still pouring from its lips.

"What are these papers in your hand?" I asked, not for information, but for breath. (You have seen a caged canary leap from its perch to its swing, and back again, when sorely pressed.) He speedily closed that door.

"They, sir? Div ye no' ken what's they? They's Doctor Grant's heids and pertikklers. Doctor Grant's heids and pertikklers, I'm tellin' ye. A' o' them but ane is the heids an' pertikklers o' sermons that made St. Cuthbert's ring like the wood on an August nicht when the thunder roams it. That ither ane he preach't in a graun city kirk wha soucht to get him, and they cudna—an' it was croodit like the barn mou' when harvest's dune, an' I was there masel', an' he

kent me—an' I'm the man that held his cane in ma haun the time he preach't, I'm tellin' ye." And Donald's withered face was now aglow with such a tenderness as only bygone years can loan to age; his eyes were ashine with tears, each one the home of sheeted days that had come back from the dead, and his parted lips were drinking deep of the mystic tides of memory.

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A rich mosaic was the visitation of this sterling race. The lovely valleys and the picturesque hills of their ancestral sires I have often roamed since then, but never have I seen the Scottish character in its homely beauty as it appeared to me in their happy Canadian life among the cozy farmhouses of this fruitful countryside. The traditions of their native land were tenderly cherished by them all, and many were the stories they related of the old days in Scotland and of the day whereon they looked their last upon the unforgotten heather.

One of my first visits was to Mrs. Gavin Toshack, whom I found in a reminiscent mood.

"Ay," she said, "we're a' Scotch aboot thae pairts; an' God keep us sae. There's been scarce a fly in the ointment, forbye Sandy Trother's wife, who gied him, an' gied us a', a heap o' tribble; but she was Irish, ye ken. An' oor ministers hae a' been frae

Scotland; but we had ane for mebbe twa month or mair—nae oor ain minister, but only a kin' o' evangelist buddy. He was an Irish buddy tae, but there were severals converted. That was nae Irish wark whatever, but the grace o' God. We were na lang oot frae the auld country when he cam'; I mind fine. It was in the year '37. We sailed frae Annan Water Foot in July, an' eight weeks or mair it took us afore we landit in Quebec. Then by canal and wagon till we reach't New Jedboro; 'twas a sair, weary ride. But the breath o' freedom an' o' promise was in the air—an' we hae oor ain hame noo an' twa hunner acres o' the finest land in a' the country. An' we're independent noo, wi' eneuch for a bite an' a sup till we hunger nae mair nor thirst ony mair. An' oor bairnies is a' daein' fine: Jamie's a doctor i' Chicago; an' oor Jeanie's mairrit on Allan Sutherland, him as will be the new Reeve o' the coonty; an' Chairlie has a ranch i' Alberta like the Duke o' Roxburgh's estate; an' Willie 'll hae oor ain land here, when we sleep aneath it.

"I aften sit an' think we micht hae been aye herdin' sheep on the Dumfries hills, wi' scarce eneuch to eat, wi' this man 'my Laird' an' yon man 'yir Grace' an' oor ain bairns little mair nor slaves. The duke we knelt doon afore in Scotland aften paid mair for a racin' filly nor we paid for a' this bonnie land

we ca' oor ain the day. Canada's nae sae guid for earls an' lairds, but it's graun' for puir honest fowk. An' what's mair," continued Mrs. Gavin, "we didna hae the preachin' i' the auld country we hae in Canada—leastwise, no' as graun' as we used to hae i' the time o' Doctor Grant. Div ye ken, sir, the grandest thing I ever heard come oot o' his mooth? No? Weel, it was this. He aye preach't fearfu' lang, as ye've nae doot heard, an' at times the men fowk wad weary an' gang oot, some to tak' a reek wi' their pipes an' mair to gang ower the way an' hae a drap juist to liven the concludin' heids o' the discoorse (for they aye steppit back); but the Doctor didna seem to understaun'. Weel, ae day some o' them was stampin' doon the aisle, an' the Doctor, he juist stoppit an' sat doon, an' then he says, 'Ma freens, we'll bide a wee till the chaff blaws awa'.' Losh, hoo they drappit whaur they stood! There was nae mair gaun oot that day, I tell ye, nor mony a day. But mind ye, 'twas fearsome the time atween when he sat doon in the pulpit an' when he speakit oot like I telt ye; it was clean fearsome."

VII

"The CHILD of The REGIMENT"

MY labours in St. Cuthbert's had covered but a few fleeting years (oh, relentless ticking of the clock! at once the harbinger and the echo of eternity), when there came into our lives life's greatest earthly joy. Serene and peaceful our lives had been, every hour garlanded with love and every year festooned by the Hand Unseen.

Trials and difficulties there had been indeed, but they were as billows which carried in their secret bosom the greeting of the harbour and the shore. Even the roots of sorrow had been moistened by the far-off wells of joy. To many a guest of God, disguised in the habiliments of gloom, we had turned a frowning face and had bidden such begone. But such guests heeded not, pressing relentlessly in upon our trembling hearth, when lo! the passing days revealed their mission; we saw the face hidden beneath the sombre hood, and prayed the new-discovered guest to abide with us unto the end. For God loveth the masquerade, and doth use it everywhere.

The way to hell appeareth glorious oftentimes, but the pathway unto life is robed in shadows and its sign-post is the cross—which things are a masquerade and to be witnessed every day; for in one single day all God's great drama is rehearsed in miniature.

Our manse was a pleasant place, and its site had been selected by some one with the nursery-heart. Spacious and genial was the old homely house, with its impartial square. Rooms there were, and halls, waiting to echo back some voice uncoarsened by the clang of time and uncorroded by the salt of tears. Rich terraces flowed in velvet waves down to the waiting river, murmuring its trysting joy; a full-robed choir of oak and elm and maple kept their eternal places in a grander loft than man could build them, while pine and spruce and cedar, disrobing never, but snatching their bridal garments from the winter storm, swelled the sylvan harmony.

Here came the crocuses and the snowdrops, trembling like the waifs of winter, and hither came the violet and the dandelion to reassure these daring pioneers; later on, the pansy and the rose utterly convinced them that they had not lost their way, but had been guided by the pilgrims' Friend.

But no child's voice had waked these sombre echoes, no child's gentle feet had pressed this velvet sward; no radiant shadow such as childhood alone

can cast had flitted here and there beneath these lonely trees, nor had these flowers felt their life's great and only thrill in the touch of a baby's dimpled hand. But that golden door at last swung gently open. That hour of ecstasy and anguish brought us life's crown and joy, and the hills of time, erstwhile green and beautiful, were now radiant with a light kindled from afar.

St. Cuthbert's rejoiced exceedingly when our little Margaret was given unto us, but we knew it not at first, for Scotch joy is a deep and silent thing, a fermentation at the centre rather than an effervescence at the surface. For our Margaret was as one born out of due time, the first child whose infant cry had awakened the echoes of their ancient manse, though seventy long years had flown since their first minister had come among them. Thus she became the child of the regiment and they silently exulted. Jubilant, one hour after this new star had swung into the firmament, I hoisted the Union Jack to the topmost notch of our towering flag-pole, and never has it flaunted its triumph more jubilantly since.

The beadle reported to me afterwards that the other churches were mightily jealous of our late autumn bloom, and one of their devotees, an Episcopalian, had asked him sneeringly —

"What's that flag doing there?"

"It's blawin' i' the wind," retorted my diplomatic beadle.

"It's nothing to be so joyful over," urged the Episcopalian brother.

"It's mair nor ever happened in yon kirk o' yours; an' it's mair nor could happen to the Pope o' Rome, wha's a true freen o' yours, I'm jalousin'," snorted my beadle back triumphantly; for William was uncharitable, and despaired of all ritualists, the iron of covenanting protest running hot within his blood.

Nor were these the only swords that flashed above our Margaret's cradle; for a Methodist mother in Israel, hopeful of a sympathetic response from Elsie M'Phatter (the non-churchgoing one), ventured the comment that similar events in her own brilliant maternal record had provoked no unseemly joy; to which Elsie responded tartly—

"I ken that fine, and it's very nat'ral, for ye've had mair nor maist; but gin ye hadna had ane for a maitter o' seventy year or mair, like us, wad ye no' hae been clean daft aboot it?" and the field thereafter was Elsie's own.

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The Sabbath morning after Margaret's dawn St. Cuthbert's was full to overflowing, as seemed to be every heart, especially every aged heart, finding its

morning anew in the life of a little child. For the morning and the evening are wondrously alike. In summer especially, the sun-bathed mountains, the pendant dewdrop, the melodious silences—all these belong so much to both alike that I find it hard to distinguish the matins and the vespers of God's cathedral days.

My voice trembled just a little as I gave out the psalm —

> "Such pity as a father hath
> Unto his children dear,"

but we sang it to the tune of "Dunfermline," and soon I was borne out to sea upon its far-flung billows; for of a truth these old Scottish tunes have the swing of eternity in them, and seem to grandly overlap the bourne of time and space. And when we prayed the only liturgy which Presbyterians will own, I could not forbear to say "Our Father" twice, and lo! a strange thing happened unto me. For a great light seemed to shine upon the words, and that little helpless life at home within the manse, and its thrice-blessed cry, and its yearning look of wonder, and its hand whose only prowess was to lie in some stronger hand of love—all these became a commentary, illustrating God, and in their cordial light I beheld Him as mother, or professor, or minister had never shown

Him to me before, bending over the souls of men, otherwise orphaned evermore. That vision has tarried with me ever since, and my people have been the better of it; for he alone can caress his people's souls who has felt the caress of His father's love. God's tenderness is the great contagion for the healing of life's long disease.

VIII

"A NEW FOOT on The FLOOR"

WHEN our daughter (are there any two other words so well-wed as these? What music their union makes!) was only about ten years old, her mother, which is my wife writ large and heavenly, and I were taking tea at Inglewood, which my long-suffering readers will remember as the home which first welcomed me to New Jedboro and the residence of Mr. Michael Blake. When our meal was over, Mr. Blake and I were enjoying a quiet game of billiards, which was a game I loved. But I may have more to say about this later on, for so had some of my pious people, though I am inclined to think that they objected not so much because they thought the game was wrong as because they feared I was enjoying it. For, to some truly good Scotch folk the measure of enjoyableness is the measure of sin, and a thing needeth no greater fault than to be guilty of deliciousness. But the converse of this they also hold as true, namely, that what maketh miserable is of God, and to be wretched is to be pious at the heart. For which reason, I have observed often-

times, they deem that to be a truly well-spent Sabbath day which had banished all possible happiness from their children's lives, bringing them to its close limp and cramped and sore, but catechism-full and with a good mark in the book of life for every weary hour.

Was it Johnson who ventured the opinion that the Puritans put bear-baiting under the ban, not because it was painful to the bears but because it was pleasant to the people? Whether it was or no, I shall not discuss it. Neither shall I discuss the ethics of billiards, unless it be to say this much, that if there be games in heaven, I do not doubt it will have an honoured place, for it is an ivory game and truthful, abhorring vagrant luck and scoring only by eternal laws which Euclid made his own. And I make no doubt that many a hand hath plied the billiard cue which long ere this hath touched with its finger-tips the ivory gates and golden.

But to return. We were in the very midst of our game, of which I remember very little, often and often though I have tried to recall every feature of that eventful night. But I do recall that we spoke about our Margaret, and there was a deep strain of wistful envy in Mr. Blake's voice. I remember well his saying that God's richest earthly gift was that of wife and child and hearth.

"Though I speak," he added almost bitterly, "as I might speak of distant stars, for I have no one of the three," and his lips closed tightly while he drove his ball with a savage hand.

"You have not wife or child," I said, "but no man who has been sheltered by your friendship can agree with you about your hearth. It has warmed my heart too many times when that heart was cold."

"There is no hearth where there is neither wife nor child," he answered almost passionately. "Hearths are not built with hands. Do you not know, sir, that if a man would have a fireside he must begin to kindle it when youth is still throbbing in his heart? From boyhood up he is preparing it, or else he is quenching it in darkness. Do you know, sir, if I were a preacher I would burn that into young men's hearts till they would feel that heaven or hell were all bound up with how they reverence or despise their future fireside. I would tell them that no man can lay his hearth in ashes in the hot days of youth, and then build it up again in the rainy days of age.

"I would tell every wastrel, and every man who is rehearsing hell with his youthful follies, that he cannot eat his cake and have it. For hearth and wife and child are not for him. I would tell him that he cannot breed a cancer in his heart while he is young

and cure it with some pious perfume brewed by the hand of age. I would tell them that till my lips blistered, and then they should hear of the grace of God till those same lips were rosy with its healing."

Amazed, I stood and gazed at him, for there was a fearful fascination in his face. The face of a saint it was, with that warlike peace which only a battling and victorious life can give, but it had for the time the half-hunted look of one who trembles at the sound of footsteps he had hoped were forever still, of one whose soul was overstormed by surging waves of memory. There is sometimes a dread ghastliness in the thought that out of the abundance of a man's heart his mouth is speaking, though he declares it not. It is like the procession of a naked soul; or, to change the figure, it is like beholding a man unearth some very corpse he had long sought to hide.

It was his turn to play—ah me! the grim variety of life—and his ball failed but narrowly of a delicate ambition.

"If I could but have it back and play it over," I heard him rather sigh than say, whereat I bethought myself of the high allegory of a game.

Musing still, I stood apart, gazing as one gazes at a fire, which in very truth I was.

"It is your shot, sir," he said, in a voice as passionless as when I first heard it years before.

My ball had but left my cue when the door opened and a servant said —

"There's a young man doon the stair, sir, and he says he wants to speak wi' the minister."

I descended, hearing as I went a rattling fusilade of ivory, which I knew was the echo of a soul's thunder-storm.

* * * * * *

How often do we meet new faces, little recking their relation to coming years! Yet many an unfading light and many an incurable eclipse has come with a transient meeting such as this! How many a woman of Samaria goes to draw water from the well, and sees—the Lord! For I met only a boy, or better, a laddie—boyhood-breathing word!—about sixteen years of age, openly poor but pathetically decent. His clothes were coarse and cheap and even darned, bearing here and there the signatures of poverty and motherhood.

I advanced and took his hand; for that is an easy masonry, and its exercise need never be regretted even if it never be repeated. My wife once spent a plaintive day because she had wasted a hand-shake upon a caller whom she took to be an applicant for matrimony, whose emoluments were hers, but who turned out to be an agent for Smith's Dictionary of

the Bible, whose emoluments were his own. Nevertheless I have always held that no true hand-shake is unrecorded in the book of life.

"And what can I do for you, my lad?" I said.

"I dinna ken, sir," he answered, in a voice that suggested a sea voyage, for it was redolent of what lies only beyond the sea.

"What is your name?"

"Angus Strachan, sir, and I come frae Ettrick, and I hae my lines frae the minister o' the Free Kirk."

"And when did you land, Mr. Strachan?"

"Ca' me Angus, sir, if ye please. Naebody has ca'd me by that name sin' my mither pairted wi' me at the stage coach road, and she was fair chokit wi' cryin', and when I cudna see her mair for the bush aboon the burn, I could aye hear her bleatin' like a lamb—an' it was the gloamin'. An' I can fair hear her yet. Will ye no' ca' me Angus?"

Accursed be the heart which has no opening door for the immigrant's weary feet, and thrice accursed be the heart which remembers strangerhood against some mother's homeless boy. Such malediction, thank God, my soul has never won, for if there be one sight which more than another fills me with hopeful pity, it is the spectacle of some peasant lad making the great venture of an untried shore, pressing in to those who were also foreigners one far-back

cheerless day, and asking if this Western land may harbour still another exile from the poverty he seeks to flee. Especially is this true of Scottish laddies; for upon their faces seems to be written: "I ask for but a chance such as thou hadst thyself," which was the plea of Tom Carlyle when he first knocked at London's mighty door.

So I drew nearer to him, and my heart flowed through my voice as I said again—

"When did you land, Angus lad? and tell me all about yourself. I have heard that mother's cry before." For I was thinking of my own mother's parting blessing, save that hers was wondrously exultant as becometh one who calls back from the unseen Chariot of God.

"I landed yesterday at Montreal, and I cam' ower on the *Lake Ontario*. And I hae but little to tell, and it wunna tak' me lang. Ma mither weaves in Ettrick, and I herded sheep upon the hills sin' I was able. But I was aye hame at nicht, and she aye keepit a licht in the window when the nicht was dark and her shadow fell upon it, for she aye cam' oot to meet me when she heard me lilt the sang. And she lilted tae, and we baith sang it thegither till we met, and then we gaed ben thegither and gaed na mair oot till the mirk was by."

I detected the serious and lofty figure in his words,

and the vision of Scotland's lowly altars and thatched cathedrals rose before me. No man could mistake the ritual of which that strain was bred.

"And why came you here, Angus?"

"I cam' here," he answered, "to better masel'. I heard tell o' Canada sin' I was a bairn, and they a' spak' it fair for a land whaur an honest man micht mak' an honest leevin'—and mair tae," he added, true to the Scotch afterthought of an extra.

"And what line do you propose to follow? What work do you intend to do?"

"Ilka line that's straight, an' ony wark that willna soil the soul even gin it may soil the hands," he answered quickly.

My soul went out to the lad, for I saw that his heart's roots were deep in the best heart-soil the world hath known, and that the Atlantic's billows had not quenched the light of his mother's cottage fire.

"Your father is dead, is he, Angus?" was the next step in my examination for discovery, as the lawyers say.

"No, he's no' deid, he's alive," replied the lad, with the exactitude which marks his race; "but I dinna care to speak aboot him."

"Very well, very well, boy," I rejoined hastily; "spends his time and his money and your mother's

money, when he can get it, at the Red Cow, or the Cock and Hens, a drunken wastrel and cruel too; for I have been enough in Scotland to know that such hens lay deadly eggs and such red cows' milk is red with blood." All this latter part, of course, I said to myself, but no word of it to the lad before me, for no honest youth can bear any lips to miscall his father save his own.

"You will come to the manse with us and stay the night; it is too late to seek other lodging now."

"Thank ye kindly, sir, but I hae a wee pickle siller in my pocket," he replied, with modest independence. I verily believe that in heaven all Scotsmen (and even Scotch Freemasons) will be found wi' a wee pickle siller in their pockets when they receive that great degree.

But I insisted, and I won; for he who wages the campaign of hospitality hath God for his ally, and no heart can finally resist that siege.

IX

"ANGELS UNAWARES"

I PRESENTED him to my wife and to my host, whose cordiality was worthy of his wealth and his success. Perhaps he was thinking of an hour like unto this when, so many long years before, he too had reached New Jedboro by night, friendless and poor, also craving work, beginning that steady climb which had brought him to the dizzy heights of wealth and influence.

For memories of poverty, like poor relations, should not be thrust out at wealth's back gate, but should have a choice room in the mansion at whose door the sated heart will often knock, seeking rest.

My wife has frequently told me that she liked Angus from the start because he seemed so robed in health and draped in a kind of pathetic modesty, with eyes whose colour she was certain would not fade. How women do love the metaphors of millinery! How better than the sage of Chelsea they understand the philosophy of clothes! But she also added that she was charmed by the way he spoke his mother's name, for in his tone she caught the flavour of a quick caress; and woman is more facile far than man

in her translation of these Hebraic breathings. Besides all this, he held the gate open as she passed through into our manse estate; she still remarks that this was a little thing, but contends that he did it in a great way.

We showed the tired stranger to his room. Distinguished guests we have had beneath the roof of St. Cuthbert's manse. We once had Major Pond, the great cicerone of great lecturers; he had brought Ian Maclaren to our town, who in turn brought the spring to all of us, beguiling moisture even from long-sullen clouds.

He had stayed with Mr. Blake, which was but fair, for these are wealth's real prerogatives; but the genial Major stayed with us. We were greatly charmed, for he charmed us till two o'clock in the morning; and my wife, fearful that she might stampede him to his bed, rose at intervals and hid her face in the geranium window when she had to yawn. But it was the clock and not the Major that provoked these mild convulsions. He rehearsed to us his glorious achievements with his "stars." Some few plaints he had, wherein he "wept o'er his wounds," but almost all his tales were "tales of valour done." He told the number of his "stars," vividly described how he held them in his right hand, pointed out to us how one "star" differeth from another "star" in

glory, and went to bed at last with the air of a man who had gilded the Pleiades, brushed up Castor and Pollux, and house-cleaned the heavens generally.

Stanley, Farrar, Beecher, and a score of others filtered through him as he sat by our humble fire, turning his telescope this way and that as a sportsman turns his gun, while the very clock ticked slow to listen. My wife became quite confused, probably sun-struck, for she has since affirmed that the Major claimed to have been present at the birth of every one of these famous men on whom he early resolved to confer immortality. My recollection of his night's autobiography is rather that of a lane of dazzling light, in which there stood now one and now another giant, but all alike clinging to the Major's hand.

But this does not exhaust our list of the famous men whose ponderous heads have pressed the pillow whereon the exiled Angus now laid his own to rest. For we once had the Moderator. The Moderator of what? some unsophisticated gentile will wish to know. Of the General Assembly, of course, for that is the Westminster Assembly of Divines in recurring resurrection, and it hath its unadjourning court in heaven, as the ambushed correspondent of the Hebrews doth inform us. Which proves, my precentor tells me, that the New Jerusalem is a Presbyterian city and singeth nothing but the psalms.

The Moderator, as I have already said, abode with us over night, and we almost begrudged the sleeping hours, for, if you will waste sleep upon a Moderator, let it be when he is preaching and not when he is filling your house with dignity and smoke. For the Moderator loved his pipe, and so did I, and together we revelled in those clouds before which all other clouds retreat. What a great leveller is that democrat, tobacco. For while we smoked we were both moderators, and even an Assembly clerk could not have told which was which. Twice, too, the Moderator filled from my pouch, with no air of patronage, and I shall never forget it of him. When he went to his bed, still redolent of Virginia, he asked me for a little soda water, very little, he said emphatically. I brought it to him, and passing by his door a moment later, I heard a low gurgling sound like that of an infant brook, then silence, then an honest smack—soon after there emerged a festive flavour, a healing aroma, sweetly distilling. As I went back to our room, I said to my wife, "What a fine spirit a Moderator can shed through a house," in which opinion she agreed, though she knew not what I said. I was all but asleep when she aroused me with —

"Tom, why is a Moderator called a Moderator?"

"Because he takes it moderately, dear," I answered, being only in the twilight of intelligence.

"Takes what, Tom?" she asked.

"His honours, sweetheart—go to sleep."

But although we have had great guests like these, I do not know that I was ever more glad with the thought of a sleeping stranger than with the knowledge that this homeless lad was beneath our roof that night. For he who homes the honest poor has borrowed the guests of God, and a mother's wandering son is His peculiar care.

I knew that the great Executor of all praying mothers leaves them not long indebted to any man; He Himself shall speak with their creditors in the gate.

X

My PIOUS PROFLIGATE

MY wandering but faithful pen, whose every child, though homely, is its legitimate own, must now forsake Angus and his fortunes for a season. It shall again return to him, *if it be spared.* For the good folk of St. Cuthbert's have taught me to insert this phrase at every seasonable opening—indeed, they deem it fitting for every season, and the very first marriage in New Jedboro at which I officiated afforded a vivid proof of this.

The young couple were just emerging from the heavenly operation, still somewhat under the celestial chloroform, when Ronald M'Gregor admonished them. His admonition was after a fashion almost ministerial, for Ronald had once culled himself from out the common herd as meant for a minister, and had abandoned his pursuit only when he found that he had every qualification except the gifts.

"Ye maun bear in mind," he said, "that ye're nae mair twa, but ae flesh; an' ye'll bide wi' ane anither till deith shall ye pairt—that is, gin ye're spared."

Meantime, this friendly pen must record this news of Angus, that the very morning he left St. Cuth-

bert's manse he entered upon his apprentice term in the great iron manufactory of which Mr. Blake was the head and the propelling power; for behind every engine is the ingenuity, not of many men, but of one.

And leaving him there to ply his fortune and to confront that unseen antagonist against whom every ambitious man plays move and move about, I betake myself again to the records of St. Cuthbert's.

Yet I find it hard to dismiss the lad, for his is a besetting face, and besides, it stubbornly appears above the main current of all the story I have yet to tell.

My fortunes with these strange Scotch folk must be recorded, and chief among my handiwork I think of Geordie Lorimer. For he was a typical Scot, and supremely so in this, that he could be both very religious and very bad. Of which the remarkable thing lies here, that he was both of these at one and the self-same time.

Now, although I am an Irishman, and boast the most romantic blood of time, yet must I frankly admit that few countrymen of mine have such facility. Many of them there are who could be religious, and more who could be bad, with spontaneous ease, but few there be who know how to be both at once. But Geordie did. He was a profligate, but a pious profligate; a terror he was, but he

was a holy terror. Mind you well, I do not mean to impugn Geordie's sincerity in the last appeal; not for one moment, for I believe implicitly that Geordie, in the very heart of him, meant to do well. Indeed, I will go further, and say that in his very soul he wished to be closer to God; for he could not well help that wish—it was his inseparable heritage from a saintly father, long a beloved elder in St. Cuthbert's, whose sacred suit of "blacks" Geordie had inherited, himself wearing them to the sacrament till the session denied him his token, and shut him out, blacks and all. The memory of his mother's life was still fragrant to hundreds, fresh and dewy in love's unwithering morn; upon the tide of prayer had Geordie's infant life been launched, and its gentle waves, faint but palpable, still sought to lave his soul.

How many a Northern island-life, bleak and wild, is redeemed from utter destruction by that great gulf-stream, the prayers of a mother who was in league with God! Thus it came about that Geordie Lorimer's life was a muddy stream, still tinged with the crystal waters of its hill-born spring. He had made the ghastly find, that when he would do good, evil was present with him; to will was present with him, but how to perform that which was good he found not. For Geordie had, alas! a stronger thirst than that for righteousness. He was given to "tast-

ing," a homeopathic word which Scotsmen use to indicate a trough. I soon heard of him as incorrigibly religious but incorrigibly dry.

Geordie was the best-known character in New Jedboro, as well known as the town pump, the one famed for its outgiving, the other for its intaking powers, but both alike for liquid prowess. His principal occupation was in his wife's name, being a boarding-house whose inmates were secretly and shamefully proud of Geordie's unique superiority in his own particular line, for he could outdrink the countryside.

The very Saturday which preceded my Sunday as a candidate of St. Cuthbert's (they afterwards told me) Geordie was in the kindly grip of the town constable, who was bearing him towards the jail, his victim loudly proclaiming to the world that the guardian of the law had arrested him only when he, Geordie, had refused to treat for the eleventh time.

"He tret the ainst, an' I tret ten times or mair," Geordie was vehemently affirming to a sympathetic street. Turning a corner, they met no less a personage than Sandy Weir, the session clerk.

"Sandy, dinna let him tak' me to the lock-up. There's to be a new minister i' the kirk," he cried, "an' I maun gang to hear him preach the morn.

Sandy, wull ye no' bid him no' to tak' me to the lock-up?"

But Sandy was a man under authority, having elders under him, and he refrained, knowing the boundaries of his power.

Passing along a quiet street some years after this, I beheld the unreforming Geordie in a savage fight with a kindred spirit, who drew his inspiration from the same source as his antagonist; for many a cork they had released together. The two men fought like tigers, abandoning themselves the more cheerfully to the combat they both knew would end in a renewal of brotherhood and beer. This thought lent a sanguine enthusiasm to their every effort, for each felt it a point of honour to make the engagement worthy of the "treaty" (a fitting word) that awaited them at the Travellers' Rest.

Above the din of battle I heard a voice emerging from Geordie's head, which head emerged from his opponent's oxter—

"Dinna mark me, Jock, dinna mark me; for we're gaun to hae the bairn baptized i' the kirk the morn," and I knew not which to admire more, Geordie's moral versatility, or the beautiful comity of war.

Geordie did appear in the kirk with the bairn the next morning, unmarked, except by unusual solemnity. He did not take the vows, of course—

these were assumed by his long-suffering and devoted wife; but Geordie felt he should be there as collateral security.

I coveted Geordie's soul, and longed to add his regeneration to the new Acts of the Apostles. No opportunity to speak with him was ever allowed to slip, and one came to me whose details I must recount. There had been an election for the town council, which had, half in joke and half in jealousy, returned Geordie as the councillor of his ward; for our glorious manhood suffrage, as some one has pointed out, makes Judas Iscariot as influential at the polls as the Apostle Paul.

Returning, the night of the election, from a sick-bed visit, I overtook the jubilant Geordie, full of emotion and other things. His locomotion was irregular and spasmodic, his course original, picturesque, and variable. Geordie was having it out with the law of gravitation.

He was as a ship returning from Jamaica, a precious cargo of spirits in its hold, and labouring heavily in the trough of the sea. I essayed to take his arm, intending to be his wheelsman home, but it was like trying to board a vessel in a storm; for Geordie had at least a hundred routes which he must traverse with impartial feet. After I had somewhat managed to adopt his swing, I sought to deal faithfully with

him, though it was like preaching from the plunging deck of a ship at sea, while the breath of my swaying auditor suggested that the aforesaid cargo had sprung a leak.

He was raising a double pæan to voice a twofold joy: the first, the joy of triumph in the recent contest; the second, the historic and imperishable joy that he was a Scotsman born.

"Yon whelp I skelpit the day was naething but an Irishman," he cried loftily. "I canna get Robbie Burns' graun' words oot o' my heid: 'The Scotsmen staun' an' Irish fa'—let him on wi' me,'" and on this wave of martial spirit Geordie took another plunge at right angles from our previous course, bearing me after him like a skiff tied to a schooner amid stormy seas.

After we had put about and regained our bearings, I nimbly took advantage of this patriotic opening, having ever a quick mind for the transition of ideas.

"Yes, Geordie, many good things are Scotch, and many Scotch things are good. Some misguided persons think even that Scotch liquor is good. Now, George——" But I got no further. This time Geordie swung around before me, like a boat that trusts its moorings —

"Ye're richt, minister; wha wad hae thocht ye kent the difference? But ye're richt—a' whusky is

guid, but some's mair guid nor ithers, an' Scotch is mair guid nor ony ithers. Those feckless Irish fowk aye tak' the speerits o' oor native land gin they hae the siller, which isna likely. An' I dinna blame them muckle."

I now saw that there was no opening along this line, favourable at first sight as it had appeared. The attack must be plain and straight.

"Geordie," I began, "this is a pitiable situation for a minister to be in, and you know, George ——"

"That's a' richt, minister—dinna fash yersel'. I'll no' mention it to a soul. Mony's the time I hae been fou masel', 'peetiably seetivated,' as ye ca' it, bein' mair learned nor me; to be honest wi' ye, I'm juist a wee bit 'peetiably seetivated' this vera nicht. But I'll tak' ye hame for a' that, an nane 'll hear tell o't frae Geordie Lorimer."

Then he plunged again, propelled by the sense of a new responsibility, and for a minute we two performed, unaided and alone, the several different parts of an eight-hand reel.

Nevertheless, I relinquished not my hold, for I was truly attached to the fellow, and in due time we made a mile, though I know the cyclometer would have recorded ten. More hopeful, I was steaming on, a clerical tugboat, when of a sudden Geordie stopped, pointing with his right leg high in air, trusting me

and his left to perform the relief duty thus demanded.

"Yon's ma coo, ma Ayrshire coo," he exclaimed, pointing with his initial leg to the white-faced cow which lay among its kindred, its jaw gently swinging.

"The beast disna ken," I heard him mutter; then he suddenly bolted, breaking his tether, and before I could recover him he had shambled on to the road with the gait of a delirious camel, and kicking his innocent property from behind, cried out —

"Get oot o' that. Sic like a thing, to be lyin' wi' the common herd. Mind ye, ye're no' an or'nary man's coo—ye're a cooncillor's coo." Then he retraced his labyrinthian steps in a corresponding swath.

As we drew near his humble gate (how often Geordie had made that last port with pain), he muttered to himself reflectively —

"I gied him hell," referring doubtless to the vanquished candidate.

Whereat I took him to task right sternly, giving him sharply to understand that such language was an insult to his minister and friend.

In reply, he fell upon me, literally and figuratively, with tones of reproachful tenderness.

"Minister," he said, "I own ye as a faithfu' guide."

("You'd better," said I to myself, for I was weary.) "I own ye as a faithfu' guide, an' I wudna gie ye pain. For we've had oor ain times thegither. I micht maist say as 'at 'We twa hae paiddled i' the burn,' only it wudna be becomin'. But aboot that word—I've heard ye say yirsel' frae the pulpit as how hell is a maist awfu' feelin' i' the breist. Verra well, dinna ye think as hoo yon Irish whelp I skelpit the day 'll hae a waesome feelin' i' his breist? That's a' the meanin' I desired till convey. It's nae wrang when it's expoun'it. Guid-nicht till ye, minister."

XI

PLUCKING A FIERY BRAND

BUT there are others of whom I have better things to record, and indeed better things shall yet be set down by me concerning Geordie Lorimer before these short and simple annals shall have ended. For there is nothing so joysome to record as the brightening story of a soul coming to its real birth from the travail of its sin and struggle. For perchance time itself is God's great midwife, and man's writhing agony is to the end that he may soon be born.

The serious will doubtless wish to learn what befell me in my effort to beguile the rugged Donald M'Phatter and his wife, who had quit the kirk when the kirk quit the tokens, back to the worship of the sanctuary. It is many years since they returned to St. Cuthbert's hallowed shrine, and they now sing the uncreated song.

For they have joined that choir invisible whose voices, trained by God, blend in perfect unison, but not in time; for they reckon not by days and years where they have gone to dwell.

It may be set down as certain that I would never have won them back to church had it not been that I abandoned argument and adopted friendship.

For argument, to my mind, satisfies a people's souls as well as a bill of fare will suffice a hungry man; but the heart's food is a different matter. Argument may be botany, but friendship is a flower; and one little violet is better than one big volume, or a thousand of them, as far as that goes. This is perhaps the same thing as to say that a living dog is better than a dead lion, for most big books are sepulchres—but I think that my figure hath a sweeter flavour than the other.

And when I deliver the Yale lectures to young ministers, I shall tell them that there is a blessed guile, a holy cozenage of the heart whereby they may win their people's souls by stealth. And if a parson hath some obdurate parishioner or some gnarled and snarling elder, let him attack him as a thief in the night, and turn its darkness into day.

I had to build my friendship with Donald brick by brick, and oftentimes it swayed before his blasts. A hundred times I could have been justly angry and forever done with him. But I knew a man, a very near relation, with whom God might oftener have done the same, and had not; besides, I remembered that adroit petition in the Lord's Prayer, which is the

plummet of the soul's sincerity—and I had read of One who reviled not again.

"In days far by," he charged, "oor faithers said wi' pride as hoo the ministers o' God were dyin' for the truth; but in thae modern days, a' men say as hoo they're dyin' for their steepin'" (stipend).

Now this was hard to bear, for I had declined larger stipends than I accepted from St. Cuthbert's, and some would say that this was a right and proper time to stand upon my dignity. But what is so dignified as the Cross, planted in the very centre of shame's garden? I had long before determined that no man can stand on dignity, for it must be dignity that stands upon the man, and by no act or word of his, be it remarked, but by the high act of God. For those men who stand on dignity are top-heavy things, pigmies upon stilts, triangles upside down.

Therefore I was patient with Donald, and guarded our infant friendship as a lost hunter shields his last remaining match. I said little to him about church, and much about the Highlands. For Donald was a belated Highlander, his parents having lapsed to the lowlands, where birth took him at a disadvantage; but he was ever struggling to recover Inverness.

"I was a hielandman afore I was born and a lowlandman after. I kind o' flawed doon like, ye ken," he said.

I nodded acquiescence, for it is a favourite theory of mine that a man is born of his grandparents just as much as of his father and his mother; they are equally responsible, I hold, but have the advantage of an earlier retreat.

It was Donald's great delight to recount the fighting stories of his highland ancestors. In all that bloody reel he joined again with joy. The slightest reference to it, and Donald was off—over the hills and far away, his guid blue bonnet on his head, his burly knees as bare as the bayonet his fathers bore, and the wild skirl of the bagpipes in his heart. Those pagan-Christian days, those shameful splendours of feud and raid and massacre, those mutual pleasantries of human pig-sticking, those civilized savageries and chivalric demonries—all these were Donald's sanguinary food.

"Mind ye," he would say, "half the time they didna ken what they were fechtin' aboot. But they focht a' the better for that—the graun' human principle was there; they kent that fine, an' that was a' they needit for to ken. Forbye, they foucht when the chief bade them fecht. When he gied the word, hieland foot was never slow and heiland bluid was never laggin'. Man, what a graun' chief Bonyparte wad hae made, gin the M'Phatters had ta'en him up!"

"Dinna be aye speakin' aboot yir M'Phatters," interrupted his gentle wife, now somewhat aroused, for her maiden name was Elsie Campbell, and she had her own share of highland memories. "They were guid eneuch fechters in their way, nae doot, but it wasna the Campbell way. Yir M'Phatter feet that ye're haverin' aboot was never slow when the Campbells was comin', I'll grant ye that—the Campbells did them, ye ken that fine, Donald."

"Hoots, wumman, ye dinna ken what yir sayin'. Div ye no' mind the battle o' the bluidy shirt, an' ——"

"Haud yir wheesht—I canna bide to hear aboot thae bluidy shirts an' things. It's a fair scunner', and the minister hearin' ye to the bargain," Elsie shut him off triumphantly in propriety's great name.

The first real olive branch of friendship which Donald extended to me was under cover of the bagpipes. I knew he was relenting when he first asked me if I would like to hear him play. I forged a pious lie, declaring it would give me the greatest pleasure. Surely that sin has been atoned for; I have suffered for it as no tongue can tell. The world needeth a new Dante, to write a new *Inferno*, with the bagpipes thrown in. Then will that sombre picture of future suffering be complete. I make no reckless charge against those aforesaid instruments

of music, facetiously so called. The bagpipes are a good thing in their place, but their place is with Dante and his *Inferno*.

They have survived only as bulldogs survive, from perverted sentiment, and mal-educated taste. For the Scotsman is the most sentimental among men, stubbornly and maliciously and relentlessly sentimental. The bagpipes are a legacy from the grim testament of war, and the savage breath of other days belches through them yet. Ah me! with what secret pride I hear again far other music wafted from my native Emerald Isle! Nor can I well conceal my joy that the emblem of Ireland, despised and rejected though she be, is the sweetest-tongued of all music-making things in this vale of tears. For her, no lion, tempest-crowned, for her no prowling bear, for her no screaming eagle—but the harp, melliflu-ous and tender. And although its liquid strain hath for centuries been touched by sorrow, yet there hath been music in its voice for all the happier listening world, and the day draweth near, please God, when its unfleeting joy shall descend and rest on her own fields and meadows, making glad the hearts within her humble cottages, whose only wealth is love.

But Donald's fervent passion for this warlike weapon of his fathers was unrestrained by thoughts of other lands. Had any man suggested that Irish

music was superior, he would doubtless have bidden him begone and dwell with other lyres. Such suggestion I did not dare to make. On the contrary, I smiled as he fondled his windy octopus, which he did with mysterious tenderness. Then he adjusted the creature to his lips, while I calmly braced myself for the gathering storm.

I had not long to wait. He paced dramatically back and forward for a minute in a preliminary sort of way, like one who pushes his shallop from the shore, gently pressing the huge belly of the thing with his elbow as if to prompt it for the ensuing fray. The thing emitted one or two sample sounds, not odious particularly, but infantile and grimly prophetic, like the initial squeaks of some windful babe awaking from its sleep. Then the thing seemed to feel its strength, to recognize its dark enfranchisement, and broke into such a blasphemy of sound as hath not been heard since the angels alighted where they fell.

I have heard the deep roar of the ocean, and have listened to the screech of the typhoon through befiddled sails; I have shuddered at the savage yell of the hyena, and have grown cold, even in the tropics, before the tooting of the wounded elephant; I have heard the eagle rend the firmament and the midnight fog-horn ring the changes on eternity—join them all together, and they will be still but as a

village choir compared to the infinite and full-orbed bray of the highland bagpipes.

After the first shock of sky-quake had subsided, Donald turned and looked at me with a rapt and heavenly smile, the thing emitting sundry noises all the while, like fragments from a crash of sound, comparatively mild, as a stream which has just run Niagara.

I stood, dripping with noise, fearful lest the tide might rush in again, and looking about for my hat, if haply it might have been cast up upon the beach.

"Wasna that a graun' ane?" said the machinator. "It's nae often ye'll hear the like o' that in Canada. There's jist ae man beside masel' can gie ye that this side o' Inverness—and he's broke i' the win'."

"Thank God!" I ejaculated fervently, not knowing what I said.

But Donald misunderstood me and I had nothing to fear.

"Ye're richt there," he cried exultantly; "it's what I ca' a sacred preevilege to hear the like o' that, maist as sacred as a psalm. Ma faither used to play that verra tune at funerals i' the hielands, and the words they aye sang till't was these:—

> "'Take comfort, Christians, when your friends
> In Jesus fall asleep,'

an' it used to fair owercome the mourners. If ye

were gaun by a hoose i' the hieland glens, and heard thae words and that tune, ye cud mak' sure there was a deid corpse i' the hoose."

"I don't wonder," was my response; but he perceived nothing in the words except reverent assent.

"Ay," went on Donald, "it's a graun' means o' rest to the weary heart. It's fair past everything for puttin' the bairns to sleep. Mony's the time I hae lulled them wi' that same tune when their mither cud dae naethin' wi' them. I dinna mind as I ever heard a bairn cry when I was gien them that tune."

"I quite believe that," I replied, burning to ask him if they ever cried again. But I refrained, and began my retreat towards the door.

"Bide a wee; I maun gie ye 'The MacGregor's Lament.'"

But I was obstinate, having enough occasion for my own.

"Hoots, man, dinna gang—it's early yet."

"But I really feel that I must go. I would sooner hear it some other time." At my own funeral, I meant. "Besides, Mr. M'Phatter, the bagpipes always influence me strangely. They give me such a feeling of the other world as kind of unfits me for my work."

Whereupon Donald let me go. As I fled along the lane I watched him holding the thing still in his

hand, and I feared even yet lest it might slip its leash.

But I have been thankful ever since that Donald did not ask me which other world I meant.

XII

"By That SAME TOKEN"

THIS was the first step towards the return of the M'Phatter family to St. Cuthbert's Church. I waited patiently, stepped carefully, and endured cheerfully every hardship, from the bagpipes down; but all the time I had before my mind that triumphant day when Donald and his household would once more walk down the kirk's spacious aisle, like the ransomed of the Lord who return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.

One glorious summer evening I broached the matter to them both. It was the pensive hour of twilight, and Donald had been telling me with thrilling eloquence of a service he had once attended in St. Peter's Church, Dundee, when the saintly M'Cheyne had cast the spell of eternity about him. When he had got as nearly through as he ever got with his favourite themes, I asked him to listen to me for a little, and not to interrupt. He promised, and I talked on to them for an hour or more, the twilight deepening into darkness, and the sweet incense of nature's evening mass arising about us where we sat.

It was the hour and the season that lent themselves

to memory, and I armed myself with all the unforgotten years as I bore down upon their hearts. The duty, the privilege, the joy of mingling with the great congregation in united voice and heart to bless the Creator's name, all this I urged with passionate entreaty.

"Oh, Donald," I cried at last, forgetting his seventy years and the title those years deserved, "come back, come back, man, to the fountain at which you drank with joy long years ago! Oh, Donald, it is springing yet, and its living waters are for you. Years have not quenched their holy stream, nor changed the loving heart of Him who feeds them. Donald man, your pride is playing havoc with your soul. Are not the days shortening in upon you? You saw the darkness fall since we sat down together, and the night has come, and it is always night in the grave. Man, hurry home before the gloaming betrays you to the dark.

"Do you not hear yonder clock ticking in the hall that same old song of death, the same it sang, the night your father's father was born in the glen, the same it wailed the night he died? It is none other than the voice of God telling you that the night cometh fast. Oh, Donald, was it not your mother who first taught you the way to that holy spring, even as she taught your boyish feet the path to

yonder babbling burn which even now is lilting to the night? Donald man, be a little child again, and come back before you die."

Then there was a silence deep as death, and we heard the crickets sing and the drowsy tinkling on the distant hill. I spoke not another word, for when a great Scotch soul is in revolution, I would as soon have offered to assist at the creation as seek then to interfere. But I heard his wife Elsie sobbing gently and I felt a tear on Donald's cheek. My heart caught its distilling fragrance, like a bluebell on some mountainside, and I knew that the seasons were exchanging in Donald's soul, winter retreating before the avenging spring.

Suddenly he arose and swiftly spoke —

"I'll gang back on Sabbath mornin'; I'll tak' ma mither's psalm-buik, and I'll gang."

He strode quickly towards the house; as he passed me the rising moon shone upon his face, and it looked like that of a soul which has the judgment day behind and eternal mother-love before.

Elsie walked with me to the gate, and her face put the now radiant night to shame. Her long eclipse had ended. It was then she told me the secret of the token and her husband's love for it.

"Ye mauna think ower hard on Donald; I promised to tell naebody, but ye willna let him ken. It

wasna the token in itsel', but it was oor Elsie mair. Elsie was oor little lassie that's gone to bide wi' God.

"Weel, when she was a bit bairn, she aye gaed wi' us to the sacrament, and she was awfu' ta'en up wi' the token. She wad spell oot the bit writin' on't, and she thocht there was naethin' sae bonnie as the picture o' the goblet on the ither side o't. And she wad thrust her wee bit haun' intil Donald's wes'coat pocket, where he aye keepit the token, an' she wad tak' it oot an' luik at it, an' no' ask for sweeties or gang to sleep or greet, like ither bairns. And when she was deein', she askit for it, and she dee'd wi' it in her haun'. An' that verra nicht, when Donald an' me was sittin' fon'lin' her gowden curls an' biddin' ane anither no' to greet—for ae broken hairt can comfort anither broken hairt—he slippit the token frae oot her puir cauld wee haun', an' he read the writin' that's on't oot lood: 'This do in remembrance of Me,' an' he says, 'I'll dae it in remembrance o' them baith, mither—o' Christ an' oor Elsie—an' when I show forth the Lord's death till He come, I'll aye think o' them baith, an' think o' them baith thegither in the yonderland—Christ an' oor Elsie—an' me an' you tae, mither, a' thegither in the Faither's hoose.' An' a' the time o' the funeral he hauded the token ticht, an' he keepit aye sayin' till himsel', 'Christ an' oor Elsie—an' us a'.'

"Next Sabbath was the sacrament, an' Donald gaed alane, for I cudna gang wi' him, and that was the day they tell't the fowk hoo communion cairds was better, an' hoo they wudna use the tokens ony mair. Then Donald grippit the seat, an' he rose an' gaed oot o' the kirk, an' cam hame, an' gaed till his room, an' I didna see his face till the gloamin'. Oh, minister, dinna think owre hard aboot him. That's why he never gaed mair to the kirk, for he loved oor Elsie sair."

I pressed her hand in parting, but I spoke no word, for I was thinking passionately of those golden curls, and that little hand in which the token lay tightly clasped; but it was our Margaret's face that was white upon the pillow. Love is a great interpreter.

The next Sabbath morning saw Donald and Elsie in the courts of Zion, and great peace was upon their brows. When I ascended the pulpit stairs, they were already in their ancestral pew, now the property of Hector Campbell, who had abandoned it with joy, only asking that he be given one in the gallery from which he might see Donald's face.

We opened our service with the Scottish psalm —

"How lovely is Thy dwelling-place,
Oh, Lord of hosts, to me,"

and a strange thing befell us then. Donald was singing huskily, struggling with a storm which had its centre in his heart, all the more violent because it was a summer storm and fed from the inmost tropics of his soul. But it was the part Elsie took in that great psalm which is still the wonder of all who were there that day, though her voice hath long been silent in the grave. She had, years before, been reckoned the sweetest singer of all who helped to swell St. Cuthbert's praise. Her voice had been trained by none but God, yet its power and richness were unequalled. But her last song had been by the bedside of her dying child, and those who heard her say there was not a faltering note.

And now her voice was released again, and her unchained soul, aflame with its long-silent love for the courts of Zion, found in that voice its highway up to God. No psalm-book, no note of music made by hand, no human thought repressed her or trammelled her exultant wing. Uncaged, she sang as the lark sings when native meadows bid its exile cease.

From the first note, clear and radiant, as on a golden staircase her voice went upward with its loving sacrifice. All eyes were turned upon her, all other voices hushed in wonder, while even the wondering precentor abdicated to join the vassal throng.

But she knew it not—knew nothing, indeed, but that she was again in the unforgotten house of God, and pouring out her soul to the soul's great Comforter. And she sat down with the others when the psalm was done, but wist not that her face shone.

* * * * * *

The kirk session was convened in my room after the great service ceased, and the glow of joy was on every face. This joy they carefully concealed, as was their way, but I felt its heat even when I could not see its gleam. One or two spoke briefly, and their parted lips disclosed their deep rejoicing, but only for a moment, as you have caught the bed of flame behind the furnace's swiftly closing door. I told them, in a word, of Donald and his Elsie and his token.

They were stern men, and ruled the kirk with sternness; they had dealt faithfully with more than one who sought to restore the reign of the token against the expressed ruling of the session. They nipped contumacy in the bud.

But it was moved by Ronald M'Gregor, and seconded by Saunders M'Dermott, and unanimously carried, "That the clerk be instructed to inform Donald M'Phatter, and his wife Elsie M'Phatter, that

it is the will of the kirk session of St. Cuthbert's that they be in no wise admitted to the sacrament except on presentation of tokens regularly stamped and bearing the date of 1845."

XIII

WITH The WORKMEN

I THINK we first realized the worth of Angus Strachan the year of the great strike among the mechanics of New Jedboro. That was a terrible year, and the memory of it is dark and clammy yet. For our whole town, and almost every man's bread and butter, rose and fell with the industry or the idleness of our great iron manufactories. To my mind, the cause of the trouble was twofold: first, that the proprietors were very rich; and second, that the agitators were very scoundrels. For we had as happy a class of working men in New Jedboro, take them on the whole, as the God of work looked down upon. They were in receipt of fair and considerable wages, their shops were clean and well ventilated, and their hours reasonably short, especially if compared to those poor creatures whom greed and selfishness keep behind the counters till twelve o'clock on a Saturday night. And I have noticed that those who howl the loudest about long hours are those who postpone their shopping till ten or eleven of these same Saturday nights.

For the most part, they owned their own homes

and the plots of ground they gardened, and I do contend that the watering-can and the spade and the pruning knife are a means of grace. Very many of them made twelve shillings a day, which is three dollars in our good Canadian money, and some of the highest paid made twice as much. And there was work for them every working day and every working hour of the day.

The peace was broken when two sleek and well-dressed agitators came to town, agents for the Central Organization, whose mild and pleasant duty it was to tell free-born working-men when they were to work and when to starve.

These gentlemen soon precipitated a general strike, in which they took a highly sympathetic part, reviving the flagging courage of half-starving wives and children, exhorting them to endure unto the end; and be it said to their lasting credit, these aforesaid gentlemen toiled faithfully to spread their new evangel, desisting only three times a day, when they repaired to their six-course meals at the Imperial Hotel.

They pointed out, between meals, to the hungry men how well-pleasing was their hunger in the sight of heaven, for it would help some fellow-workmen three thousand miles away, and possibly be of benefit to some few who had not yet been born. Hunger, they pointed out with lofty ardour, might

not be comfortable in every case, but it was glorious, and in the line of immortal fame. All of this was somewhat marred by their occasional gulping and hiccoughing, for six-course dinners are not friendly to ethereal oratory. When one of them got through, the other, having finished the picking of his teeth, would take the stand and divulge anew to these underfed immortals the secrets of the Book of Life.

Then their poor dupes would cheer with a desperate attempt at courage, but it was to me like the bleating of sheep that are led to the slaughter. Wearily they sought their once happy homes, to find empty larders and broken-hearted wives, their wondering children crying for the necessities they had never lacked before, their clothes in tatters, and the roses departed from their cheeks.

Many a sick wife and ailing child did I visit then, pining for the little delicacies their breadwinner could not afford to buy—all of this at the behest of two bespangled gentlemen, who even then were writing to their distant wives, enclosing substantial checks, and descanting eloquently upon the sumptuous fare at the aforesaid Imperial Hotel.

Two sights there are in this panoramic world which greatly madden me, and they are twins.

The first is the spectacle of a pot-bellied landlord, his wife and family sated with every luxury, as he

smilingly takes across the bar—have you ever seen a snake swallow its prey, an equally slimy sight?—the five-cent piece of some poor fellow whose child hath neither toy nor bread, and whose broken wife, struggling in God's name to shield her children from indecency and want, will tremblingly explore his pocketbook at midnight, only to find every farthing of his wages gone. For the aforesaid smiling landlord hath poured it into the satin lap of the equally smiling wife at the Travellers' Rest.

And the other sight is the spectacle of a complacent gentleman, organ for the Trades and Labour Union, who alighteth from his Pullman car to ply his incendiary trade, living in the lap of luxury, while weeping wives stroke the famished faces of their hungry bairns and dumbly plead with God that this cruel strike may soon be over.

It was at such a time as this that Angus first impressed us with his real power. We had seen much of him in the years that had passed since he spent his first New Jedboro night beneath our roof. Often and often he would spend the evening with us, chatting on pleasant topics or teaching our Margaret the high things of chess, at which he was well-nigh a master. But I little dreamed then what fateful moves there may be even in a game of chess, what mating and checkmating and sundry other operations

may be sublimely mingled in that so interesting struggle.

We heard with pleasure that Angus was making rare progress in his chosen trade, and even now, although early in his twenties, he was head draughtsman in all that great establishment. Night schools, with wide and constant reading, had made his English almost as good as new, and the shabby lad of six or seven years ago was now a citizen amongst us of repute and promise.

But that is no rare occurrence in this new world of ours, where men have better chances than the rigid ways of the old land will afford. For old Scotland means that her mountains shall remain mountains, and her valleys she purposes shall be valleys evermore; and I make little doubt that Mr. Carnegie would have been ranked with the valleys till they received his dust had he never sought the wider spaces of our Western World. From which Western World both their hills and valleys have received his dust in rich abundance.

Passing a crowded hall one night when this industrial storm was at its height, I heard a voice which seemed familiar addressing the excited men, and surely there hath never before or since been heard a speech of greater sense and soundness.

"Are we working men fools enough," he was ask-

ing as I entered, "to be led by the nose at the will of these strangers who want us to strike in the interests of Chicago or St. Louis or San Francisco? Charity begins at home, and our first duty is to look after our own. If we are going to have dictators in this matter, let us choose them from honest workers among ourselves, and not from high-salaried importations such as these. Look at their hands the next time you get a chance, and tell me why they are so smooth and white. None of your diamond-ringed fraternity for me," cried Angus with growing passion.

At this point Jack Slater interrupted. Jack was famed for his hearty resistance to every industrious instinct, resolutely denying himself the much-lauded sweets of toil. He was the leading Socialist of the town, hating every man who was an actual toiler with his hands, always excepting the well-fed agitators, whom he worshipped with ignorant devotion.

"I just want fer to ask Mr. Strachan one question. What right has them fellows what owns the foundries to be makin' ropes of money while the likes of us only gets our two dollars a day? Let us have equality, that's what I say. Give me equality or give me death. God made one man as good as another, and it's the devil as tries to make them different. Let's divide up, that's what I say, and don't have them fellows sportin' round in their carriages and goin' to

Europe, while the rest of us is sweatin' through the dog days in the shops."

Loud murmurs of approval broke from a hundred sullen lips, and Bob Taylor, encouraged by Jack's success, jumped to his feet and shouted —

"I hopes as how all the fellers 'll stand firm and bring the bosses up with the short turn. We kin do it, for we're the lads as makes their money for them. What them kerridge fellows needs is a bash or two in the jaw from the horny hand of toil. I goes in fer rotten-eggin' all the scabs as agrees to work lower nor the wage we set, and if that won't do, I goes in fer duckin' 'em; and if duckin' won't do, I goes in fer fixin' 'em so's they won't work nowheres. If this is a free country, let's have our share of the kerridges —I believe in equality the same as Jack."

These views were received with renewed expressions of approval, for to most of the excited men they seem quite unanswerable.

"That's the ticket; make 'em walk the plank. We're just as good as them," I heard some burly mechanic mutter.

The eager audience turned towards Angus, awaiting his reply, if haply reply could be provided. It has been my lot to hear many strong addresses, but I esteem this answering speech of Angus's among the strongest utterances I have heard.

"Mr. Slater wishes," he began, "to know by what right our employers make more money than we do. In answer, let me ask him by what right Bill Montgomery, the foreman in the moulding shop, gets more money every pay-day than Tom Coxford, who is one of his men. I suppose he will admit it is because Bill has more ability and more experience than Tom; he will also admit that the difference in their wages is a just difference, and indeed I have never heard any one find fault with it. Well, carry out that principle, and some one who has more skill than Montgomery will get more money than he gets. Then there will be some one above him again, and so on till you get to the head of the firm. If differing wages are just at all—and every one admits they are—then how can you deny their legitimate profits to the men whose industry and business ability have established the concern and guided it along to what it is to-day?

"Mr. Slater says that men are all equal. I don't agree with him. It is clear that God means some men to be rich and others to be less rich. If a man quarrels with the inequality among men, his quarrel is with God. God makes some men richer than others to begin with. When we see the highest riches, like those of brains and strength, unequally divided, we need not wonder to see the lesser riches

somewhat unevenly distributed. God gives one man, or a woman like Jenny Lind, a voice that means a thousand dollars a night as often as they want to sing, and He gives another man a voice like an alarm-clock or a buzz-saw. He gives one man a mind that seems always to be full, and another man a mind, let him do his best, that is always as empty as a last year's nest. Surely I have more ground for envying the man who is born with more brains than I than the man who is born with more wealth than I. And yet God alone is responsible for the first-named inequality. We hear too much rubbish about this theory of all men being equal born.

"As for Bob Taylor's hint that we should employ violence to prevent men working for what wage they please, I have only this to say, that nobody but a lazy dog like him would suggest such a policy.

"We all know that when the whistle blows in the morning, Bob always tries how much of it he can hear before he goes in; and when it blows at night, he tries how much of it he can hear after he gets out. Bob is always slow at the end where he ought to be quick, and quick at the end where all honest men try at least to be decently slow; and then he talks to us about ducking some poor fellow who wants to make an honest living for his wife and children. I will say this much, too, that if the time ever

comes when a free-born man cannot sell his labour in the market for what price he likes, then I will turn my back upon the old flag and leave its soil forever.

"Now, I am going to ask Mr. Slater a question or two about this dividing up business.

"Do you think, Mr. Slater, if a man has a million dollars, that he ought to divide up with the man who has very little, if that man happens to be working for him?"

"Most sartintly," replied Jack.

"Very well, if a man has ten thousand dollars, should he divide up with a poorer man who works for him?"

"Sure," answered Jack promptly.

"Well, suppose a man has a house and a little garden, and he has a man hired to help dig it or repair it, should he divide up with this poorer workman who has neither house nor garden?"

Jack hesitated, his brows knit in thought; then he answered slowly—

"Naw, I don't just think so."

"Why not?" said Angus.

"Well, 'twouldn't be fair; besides, I happen to have a little house and garden of my own."

Then all that crowd of men exploded in a burst of derisive laughter which set the seal of triumph on Angus's argument.

After the uproar had subsided, an intrepid Scotsman, only a few months in New Jedboro, volunteered to address the meeting.

"I canna jist answer the argyments o' Mr. Strachan, but I maun pit forrit my idea that oor wives and bairns haena the luxuries o' them as owns the works. I canna but mind that Robbie Burns said, 'A man's a man for a' that,' an' I thocht the present a fittin' occasion to mind ye o' the words, bein' as we're met the nicht to speak oot against slavery o' ilka kind."

"No man who knows me," replied Angus, "will say that I will either yield to slavery or assist it in any form. But the man who calls himself a slave because his employer has more money than he, is no friend to honest labour. We would all like wealth, but wealth is neither happiness nor liberty. After all, the men whom we envy have not so much more than we; they can only lie on one pillow at a time, can only eat one mouthful at a time, can only smoke one cigar at a time, and as for the kind of couch a man sits down upon, it matters little so that he has earned his rest by honest toil.

"My Scottish friend hardly realizes what he says. I know he has a wife and a sweet little lassie. There is Mr. Blake, the richest of our manufacturers, and he has neither the one nor the other. Now I ask my compatriot, would he trade his lot for that of Mr.

Blake with all his money? He answers no. Then who is the richer man—Mr. Blake, or our fellow-workman from auld Scotland?

"Speaking of Scotland, let me say this one word. I lived there till I was a well-grown lad, as did scores of you, and I defy you to contradict me when I say that we are a hundred times better off here than we were among the sheep or behind the ploughs in the old land, neither of which we could hardly ever hope to call our own. Were we not there accounted almost as sheep for the slaughter? How much better were we than the kine we tended? Were not we even driven from the land we rented at a cruel price, that some haughty lord might make a deer-run of the place? What were we there but grovelling vassals, and what hope had we ever to be independent, or to own even a house in which to die?

"I do not need to tell you of the difference here, of how the most of us have our own little homes, and count our friends among the best people in New Jedboro; and three-fourths of the aldermen in our council, and the trustees of our schools, and the elders of our kirks, are from the ranks of honest labour.

"Let us thank God we have escaped from the class tyranny and the peasant bondage of the land beyond the seas."

A new and different light was now upon the rapt faces of the men—and the end of it all was that they turned the diamond-ringed gentlemen from their doors.

XIV

WITH The EMPLOYERS

NOR was this the last of Angus's eloquence. A few days later the manufacturers, being met in conclave at Mr. Blake's office, sent for the young Scotsman and personally thanked him for his good offices in settling the strike. Both sorts were there—the kind and the unkind, the gentleman and the churl—but all alike united in grateful praise for the mediation which Angus had accomplished. Many unctuous things were said, but when one tyrant arose to speak his gratitude, Angus's face bore a look which boded ill.

"We're glad," said Mr. M'Dougall, swelling with vulgar pompousness, "to see that you recognize the rights of property and the claims of vested interests. And we trust," he added, "that Labour has learned a lesson it will not soon forget." Then he sat down with the majesty of a balloon descending.

"I am glad, sir," replied Angus, "to have been of service in quelling a movement led by selfish and grasping strangers, but I may at the same time say that it would be well for Mr. M'Dougall and his

kind to pay more heed himself to the rights of property. For skill and industry and faithfulness are property just as much as Mr. M'Dougall's vested interests. And he may as well be warned that Labour will not forever tolerate the selfishness and the pride with which he treats his hands."

"I move," interrupted Mr. Thoburn, himself a gifted tyrant, "that this meeting do now adjourn."

"This meeting will do nothing of the sort." This time it was Mr. Blake who spoke, and there was iron in his voice. "None of us thought Mr. Strachan spoke too long when he was dealing with the agitators from Chicago, and let us hear him out, unless we are bigger cowards than the men who work for us."

The meeting endorsed these sentiments, and Angus resumed —

"I speak in the interests of Capital," he said, "when I declare that the fault is not all on the side of the working man. Many of our employers are kind and sympathetic men, but others of them are not. I envy no man among you the wealth he has gathered, but the selfishness of some of our manufacturers is maddening to the working man.

"Some of you know nothing of our trials and our difficulties, and, what is worse, you do not want to know. You pass by the men who are mak-

ing you rich as though they were the dogs of the street. You sit next pew to them in the kirk, and yet treat them like the dirt beneath your feet. It is doubtless your conviction that you have discharged your whole duty to us when you pay our wages every fortnight. I tell you," he cried passionately, " that is the great fallacy which is yet to prove the undoing of the employers of labour.

" You forget we are men, as well as you, and have higher claims upon you than your pay sheet acknowledges. If our employer dies, we follow him in a body to his grave. If one of us dies, you drive past his hearse with your haughty carriages, or bolt down a side street to avoid the association.

" Tom Lamplough, who has worked for Mr. Thoburn twenty years, buried his only child last Thursday, and his employer spent the afternoon speeding his thoroughbred on the race-track beside the cemetery. At the very moment when Tom was groping about the open grave, struggling with his broken heart and following his daughter with streaming eyes, Mr. Thoburn was bawling out that his filly had done it in two and a quarter—and the clods were falling on the coffin all the while."

At this juncture Thoburn arose, his face the very colour of the corpse he had disdained.

" Will no man throttle this fanatic?" he hoarsely

craved. "Must we be insulted thus by a mere working man?"

"I insult no man," retorted his accuser, "when I tell him but the truth. It was you who insulted the dead, and outraged her desolate father because he was but your servant. Is what I say the truth?"

"I decline to answer that," said Thoburn.

"You will not decline to answer before the throne of God. For you and Tom will meet yonder. Good God, man, did you ever think of that? Did it ever occur to you that you and Tom will take your last ride in the same conveyance, and have the same upholstery in the tomb? And somebody else's filly will be making its mile in less time than yours when the clods are falling on your coffin."

I have often marvelled at this strange power of rhetoric in an untutored man; but it only confirmed what I am more and more inclined to believe—that emotion and intellect are twins, and that the soul is oratory's native home.

There was a pause, but it was brief. For there flew to the rescue of his beleaguered brother Mr. Hiram Orme, the millionaire proprietor of the great Acme works. Vulgar and proud, he lived a life of ostentatious luxury.

No thought of the poor or the suffering ever disturbed the shallow tenor of his enamelled existence.

Secure in the fortress of wealth, which is a lie! he cared nothing for such wounded soldiers as had helped to build it, or for their widows or their orphans. With all sail set, he careened on his inconsiderate way, and the vessels whose side he sought were never those bearing the signals of distress.

Mr. Hiram Orme had a high contempt for all working men, and a keen suspicion of every attitude which smacked of liberty. The working man, like the negro, was happier far in a state of semi-slavery —such was the honest view of the honest man.

And now he was upon his feet, glaring with wrath, profoundly complacent in the assurance of superior wealth, and prepared to demolish both Angus and the King's English at a blow.

"Them's nice words," he broke forth, "for a working man to be using to the man what he's dependent on for to get his bread and butter. And I want for to tell this man Strachan that beggars can't be choosers. A pretty preachment he's givin' us about coffins and them like things. There's one thing certain, and that is, me and the rest of my brother manufacturers will have a sight finer coffins than him and his sort will have." The manufacturers shuddered, like men sitting in some deadly draught.

"We've had jist about enough sass from our young friend, I think; he's nothin' but a hewer of

wood and a drawer of water for us anyhow. Doesn't the Bible tell servants like him for to be obedient to their masters?"

Then Angus's Scotch blood leaped, protesting, to his face, and his soul tore open his burning lips as the tide bursts a dam built by children's hands.

"I eat honest bread, earned by honest toil," he hotly cried, "and that is more than Mr. Orme can say. I would beg from door to door before I would munch, as he does, the crusts that are stained with blood. We all know how he has ground his working girls to the earth, how he has refused to ventilate his factories, and even to heat them decently in the winter time. We all know how he has spurned the poor and the needy with his foot, and how he has crawled upon his belly before the rich and great. I will tell you something about Mr. Orme. It does not apply to all of you. Some of you, thank God! have remembered that your working men were human beings like yourselves—you have helped and befriended the sick and the poor, you have pensioned the closing years of faithful men. You have called yourselves to ask for our sick and dying, and we have blessed you for it. What poor burdened hearts want is the warm heart touch from your own hands or lips, but Mr. Orme has given neither the one nor the other.

"Mr. Orme, do you remember Dick Draper, who was your boss carder, and who lives in a little house behind your mansion? Do you remember that he worked for you ten or fifteen years, and that you discharged him because he would not leave the Union?"

"Yes, I remember him. Why?" answered Orme huskily.

"I will tell you why. A few months after you discharged him, partly because his health failed and partly because you blackballed him at all other shops, he was still out of work, his money all gone, his pantry bare, and his youngest boy dying of a slow disease of the spine. Some of us went to you and asked you to help us raise enough to send him to Montreal for treatment that might save his life. You showed us the door, and told us to tell him he could make his money like you made yours. You said if the boy died it would be one mouth less for Dick to feed, and told us there was a grand old maxim about every man for himself and the devil have the hindermost. As we were going down your splendid avenue, you shouted that Dick's spine was stiff enough when he joined the Union. Then you asked us if spines were hereditary. Then you laughed and your barns and your grand driving sheds echoed back its cruel mockery."

Orme arose and started towards the door.

"Mr. Chairman, I protest," he began.

"'Sit doon," thundered Angus, lapsing into his native tongue, "sit doon till I tell ye a'. The nicht Dick's boy was deein', we went to ye and begged ye to stop yir music and yir dancin'. For ye had some graun' fowk at yir pairty, an' the flowers for it cost ye mair nor wad hae sent the laddie to Montreal. An' the noise fashed an' fretted the deein' bairn. But ye bade us begone, an' said ye'd invite us to yir pairty when ye wanted us—an' the puir laddie dee'd in his faither's airms to the cruel music o' yir fiddles an' yir reels, an' his faither sat wi' him a' the nicht, croonin' wi' sorrow, an' yir graun' guests' laughter breakin' on him like a blizzard frae the north."

"Is the sermon nearly done?" said Mr. Orme, with a sneer. "You missed your calling; you're a preacher." The hot tears were in Angus' eyes and he seemed to have forgotten that Orme was present, the taunt lost upon him.

"I will say no more," turning now to the others, "and I have perhaps spoken over warmly. But I have uttered no word other than the truth. And I will only make my last appeal, which I know will have some weight, with most of you, at least. The remedy for all this threatening trouble lies in mutual sympathy, for I doubt not you have your own difficulties, even as we have ours. I am glad to have

helped to allay this recent trouble, and my best service shall never be denied you in the future. But I pray you to consider the words of a man who wishes you nothing else but good. Pardon what of violence and ponder what of reason has been mixed with what I said. Capital has its labour, and labour has its capital—and we are all toilers together."

He bowed to the employers and withdrew, but the seed his hand had cast was fallen, some no doubt on rocky ground, but some also on good and honest soil.

And Angus had won a victory; but his greatest triumph was unseen, for he had ruled his own spirit, which high authority assures us is greater than the taking of a city.

Not inconsiderable, too, were the outward pledges of his victory. For, as we said, the sleek agitators had been dismissed, the mills and factories were running again, and the industrial tides of life in New Jedboro gradually subsided into their old channels.

And now those unseen forces that are ever silently working to upset old standards and to displace old ways, broke out in a new form, this time threatening the very centre of one of St. Cuthbert's most established customs.

XV

A BOLD PROPOSAL

THE old precentor's box beneath the pulpit was still St. Cuthbert's only choir loft. Many years back, the iconoclasts among them had managed to gather a few of the most songful ones together in a front pew, demurely sitting as part of the congregation, but concentrated for purposes of leadership. This proved, however, more than St. Cuthbert's could abide, and its mal-odour of "High Church" alarmed the Scottish Presbyterians. Going down the aisle, Saunders M'Tavish voiced the general alarm in sententious tones —

"The thin end o' the wedge," he warningly exclaimed, "and it's no' a far cry noo to the candles an' the incense. They'll be bringin' ower the pope next," and the kirk session, convening the next night, soon stopped that leakage in their ancestral dyke.

Since then the precentor's box had preserved its lonely splendour. Within it, in the far-back thunderous days of their great Boanerges, the precentor stood to lead the swelling psalm as it rose from the

seated multitude—for they stood to pray, but sat to sing. From the fast-gathering mists that now threaten those receding years, surviving ones still rescue images of the precentor's ruffled locks, swept by the pentecostal swirl—so seemed it to his worshippers—of Dr. Grant's Geneva gown. And in this same box Sabbath after Sabbath appeared the stalwart form of Archie M'Cormack, modern in nothing but his years.

His was a conservatism of the intense and passionate sort; not the choice of his judgment, but the deepest element of his life. He no more chose old ways, old paths, or the spirit of earlier times, than the trout chooses water or the Polar bear its native snows. He was born not among them, but of them, and remained till death their incarnate descendant. No mere Scotch kirkman was Archie, but a prehistoric Calvinist, a Presbyterian by the act of God and an elder from all eternity. Even his youthful thoughts and imaginations adjusted themselves to the scope of the Westminster Confession, abhorring any horizon unillumined by the gray light which flowed in mathematical exactitude from a hypothetical heart in the Shorter Catechism.

Although, strangely enough, Archie could never master the catechism. A random question was his doom. Catechise him straight through, and his re-

sponse was swift and accurate. No thrust availed against him, a knight invincible in his well-pieced coat of mail, a very dragon of orthodoxy from whose lips there issued clouds of Calvinism, till the minister himself was often well-nigh obscured thereby. But once dip Archie into the middle of its mighty bosom to search an answer there, and he would never reappear, or, if he haply might, it would be with sorry fragments of divers answers in his hands, incongruous to absurdity. Is not the same true of babbling guides in old cathedrals?

"What is sin?" the minister once suddenly asked Archie in the course of catechetical visitation, the district being assembled at one central house. Archie's answer, being a mosaic, is still quoted by those who heard it, terror-stricken where they sat.

"Sin," replied the wide-gleaning man, "is an act of God's free grace, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in its full purpose of and endeavour after new obedience."

This terrible and miscellaneous eruption was the more lamentable from the fact that his poor wife heard this blare of discordant dogmas with unbelieving ears, while even little Kirsty gasped, exclaiming above her breath, "Ye're sair muddled, faither."

Archie looked vacantly from wife to daughter, like one who has let something drop. Then gazing de-

spondently at the minister's struggling face, he said, "I'm feart that's no' jist richt in a' its parteeklars." The epilogue was worse than the tragedy. A grim Presbyterian smile went round, more vocal than the echoing laughter of less silent sects, and it smote on Archie's ears like the scorners' bray. Forward went the catechism, a penitential gloom succeeding the sinful indulgence. The Scottish sun dips suddenly.

Sober enough now are the faces from which all merriment has fled, forgetting the precentor's discomfiture, and looking only to their own deliverance from the guns now turned against themselves. But Archie did not forget—into a secret Scottish place he had retreated, his hot, burning heart forging some weapon of revenge. It was ready in due time. An hour after, just before the armistice which the benediction alone made sure, he turned upon the honest rustics with a look of belated triumph in his face, and slew them with the retort which long travail had brought forth.

"A'm no' sae gleg on the subject o' sin as some fowk I ken."

The minister, by aid of special grace, said nothing. Archie, although he held solemnly on his way through the benediction, as became a precentor, yet chuckled exultantly all the homeward road. At evening worship he selected the Twenty-seventh

Psalm and sang the second verse with rejoicing unction —

> "Whereas mine enemies and foes,
> Most wicked persons all,
> To eat my flesh against me rose,
> They stumbled and did fall,"

and the honest rustics, as they sought the cover of their homes with emancipated feet, pronounced one to the other that most Scotch of all Scottish verdicts, half of eulogy and half of condemnation: "He's a lad, is Airchie. Ay, Airchie's a lad to be sure."

* * * * * *

What sleuth-hounds women are in matters of the heart! How quickly they take the scent of any path, virgin though it be, if that path hath been touched by the very feet of love, tracing its devious course with passionate inerrancy.

I thought the news trifling, when I told my wife that Angus and our Margaret had appeared before St. Cuthbert's session to present a certain prayer. My mind was taken up exclusively with the request they proffered. But Margaret's mother was unconcerned with their plea. Of the pleaders she thought alone. Divers questions she flung forth at me, furtive all, their author in ambush all the while.

"Did they seem interested in each other?" was the

burden of them all; for, though she avoided plainness of speech, I could yet detect her hidden fear.

But I must turn from this and tell of the enterprise in whose interest Margaret and Angus bearded the lions of St. Cuthbert's in their den. They represented the Young People's Guild, and presented the startling request that the old kirk should henceforth employ an organ to aid the service of praise on the Sabbath day. And they further asked for the introduction of the hymns. This implied a revolution, for St. Cuthbert's, up to this time, had resolutely resisted all attempts to hallow such profanities.

For the youthful pair of revolutionists I felt a decided sympathy, such as pervades every generous heart when it beholds the dauntless approach of David towards Goliath. Such citadels of orthodoxy, such Gibraltars of conservatism as Archie was, were almost all the elders of St. Cuthbert's. And against them all united did Angus and Margaret dare to turn their poor artillery of persuasion.

The session received them cordially, having all goodwill towards them personally, hating the sin but loving the sinners, to employ a good old theological phrase. Angus began, adroitly enough, with a eulogy of the psalms and paraphrases, defining them as the mountain peaks of song in all ages and in every tongue.

"In far-distant Scotland my mother is singing them to-night," he said, "and I catch the glow and the sweetness of the heather when the kirk rings with their high refrain ilka Sabbath day. But we feel that the hymns, even if they be inferior, will add richness and variety to the service of our beloved kirk."

As for the organ, he contended that it was only a means towards an end, man-made though it was; for these stern men were rigid in their distinction between things made with hands and things inspired.

Angus quoted Scripture on behalf of the organ plea, recalling David's use of instrumental music and quoting the Ninety-second Psalm —

> "Upon a ten-stringed instrument
> And on the psaltery,
> Upon the harp with solemn sound
> And grave, sweet melody."

I then called upon Margaret, and my heart misgave me as I spoke her name, for she was full of pathetic hopefulness, and seemed to think that Angus's argument had settled things beyond appeal. But I knew better than she what spray could do with frowning rocks. The elders, too, smiled tenderly upon her, for they were chivalrous in their solemn way, and besides, she was what you might call the church's first-born child, the story of which I have

already told. But theirs was a kind of executioners' smile, for they were iron-blooded men, who felt that they had heard but now the trumpeting of the enemy at the gate.

Margaret timidly expressed the view that she need, and would, add nothing more, "for," she concluded, "Mr. Strachan has covered the ground completely." This phrase "covered the ground" I do not believe she had ever used before, but every true child of the manse and the kirk is born its legitimate heir. "The previous question" is another matter, and can be acquired only through laborious years. It takes even a moderator all his time to explain it; before most Presbyteries quite master it, death moves it—and then they understand.

Poor Margaret seemed to think that Angus had made out a case which no elder could successfully assail. She knew not that there are some matters which Scotch elders consider it impious even to discuss, holding in scorn the flaccid axiom that there are two sides to every question.

The youthful petitioners withdrew, and the session indulged itself in a long silence, their usual mode of signifying that important business was before them.

The first to speak was Ronald M'Gregor: "We'll no' be needin' a motion," he said, by way of indicat-

ing that there could be no two opinions on the matter in hand.

"We'll hae to move that the peteetion be rejeckit," said Elder M'Tavish, nodding his head to signify his agreement with Ronald's main contention.

"The puir bodies mean richt," he added, being distinguished for Christian charity.

The motion was as good as agreed to, silent consent appearing upon every face, when Michael Blake arose.

"I move in amendment, that the young people's request be referred to a committee, with a view to its favourable consideration."

"I second that," said Sandy Grant, the session clerk, "not thereby committin' masel' to its spirit, but to bring it afore the court in regular order."

"What for div we need anither motion?" said Thomas Laidlaw, evidently perplexed. "There's nane o' us gaun to gie in to thae man-made hymes —an' their kist o' whustles wad be fair redeek'lus."

"Let us hear what they have to say in its behalf," said Mr. Blake. "Every honest man should be open to conviction."

"We're a' honest men," replied Thomas, "an' we're a' open to conviction, but I houp nane o' us 'll be weak eneuch to be convickit. Oor faithers wadna hae been convickit."

"It'll dae nae harm to hear the argyments," said Andrew Hogg, the silent member of the session.

At this juncture, fearing what Saunders M'Tavish had long ago called the thin edge o' the wedge, Archie M'Cormack, the precentor, came forward in hot alarm, championing the hosts of orthodoxy.

"The session 'll mebbe listen to me, for I've been yir precentor these mony years. We'll hae nae mair o' thae havers. Wha wants their hymes? Naebody excep' a wheen o' gigglin' birkies. Gie them the hymes, an' we'll hear Martyrdom nae mair, an' Coleshill an' Duke Street 'll be by. For what did oor faithers dee if it wasna for the psalms o' Dauvit? An' they dee'd to the tunes I've named to ye."

"But Mr. M'Cormack will admit," said Mr. Blake, "that many of God's people worship to profit with the hymns. There is the Episcopal church across the way. Last Sabbath I am told their soprano sang 'Lead, kindly Light,' and it was well received."

"Wha receivit it?" thundered Archie. "Tell me that, sir. Wha receivit it? Was it Almichty God, or was it the itchin' lugs o' deein' men, aye hearkenin' to thae skirlin' birkies wi' their men-made hymes?"

"Mr. M'Cormack is severe," replied Michael Blake serenely, "but I think he is unnecessarily alarmed; we must keep our service up to date. As the session

knows, I have always been in favour, for instance, of the modern fashion of special services at Christmas, Eastertide, and kindred seasons. And at such times we ought to have a little special music."

"Up to date!" retorted Archie scornfully; "it's a sair date an' a deein' ane. It'll dee the nicht, an' there'll be a new ane the morn, an' wha ever heard tell o' an Easter Sabbath in the Kirk o' Scotland? It'll dae weel eneuch for thae dissentin' bodies, wi' their prayer-books, but what hae we, wi' the psalm-buik, an' a regular ministry, an' a regular kirk, to dae wi' siclike follies? Ilka Sabbath day is Easter day, I'm tellin' ye. Is oor Lord no' aye risin' frae the dead? Gin a soul braks intil new life, or a deein' man pillows his weary heid on Him, or the heavy-herted staun' up in His michty strength, ye hae yir Easter Sabbath; an' that's ilka Sabbath, I'm sayin'. Nane o' yir enawmelled bit toys for Presbyterian fowk."

"I do not want to interfere with the good old Presbyterian ways," responded Mr. Blake; for the elders seemed to have committed the entire debate to those two representatives of the old school and the new. "But it seems to me the whole Christian religion is a religion of change," he continued; "the new path, the new and living way, the new covenant, the new name, the new song—and the new heart,"

he concluded fervently. Then a moment later he added, "Thank God for that!" and the elders looked at him in astonishment, for his face bore again that look of anguish and remorse to which I have referred before, the oft-recurring evidence of some bitter secret, deep hidden in his heart.

"We understaun' fine," the session clerk appended. "Mr. Blake is only contending that there are two sides to every question."

"Twa sides!" shouted the precentor, now on his feet again, "there's mair nor twa. There's three sides to ilka question: there's yir ain side, an' there's my side, an' there's God's side," he added almost fiercely; "an' when I ken God's side, there's nae ither side ava."

The debate was not continued long, and closed with the compromise that Mr. Blake's motion should prevail, the whole matter to be referred to a committee composed of Mr. Blake, the precentor, the moderator, and the clerk, no report to be made to the kirk session unless the committee was unanimous in its finding. This committee was instructed to meet and confer with the representatives of the Young People's Guild.

While this resolution was being recorded, Archie was still indulging in smothered protests, the dying voice of the thunder-storm; and as the session dis-

persed he was heard to say, "Committee or no committee, as lang as I'm in the kirk they'll sing the psalms o' Dauvit—an' the tunes o' Dauvit tae."

The next evening I informed Angus of the session's action, and told him the names of the committee. When I mentioned that of Mr. Blake, his eyes flashed fire, and in bitter tones he said, "I will meet no committee of which that man is one. I hate him, sir. I would as lief confer with the devil as with him."

This staggered me. I knew no cause for an outburst so passionate, nor any provocation for a resentment so savage and so evidently real. My attempt to question him concerning either met with an abrupt but final refusal. Concerning these things I said nothing to Margaret or her mother, but kept them all and pondered them in my heart.

XVI

GEORDIE'S OOT-TURN

IT was Geordie Lorimer who first taught me to curl. This I still reckon a great kindness, for I have gone from strength to strength till I am now upon the verge of tankard skiphood. Besides, Geordie's besetting sin still clinging close, I had hoped in this social way the more readily to win his friendship, with a view to his deliverance.

Some of the old elders looked askance at my frivolity, for Sanderson's "Mountain Dew" flowed freely at every bonspiel, and it was generally understood that all bigoted teetotalism was justly suspended till the ice vanished in the spring. These aforesaid elders had no sympathy with men who tasted standing up, or who took their "Mountain Dew" unwarmed.

They would gravely quote the scriptural admonition that all things should be done decently and in order, adding the exposition, logically deduced, that the more important the transaction, the more imperative that order and decency should be observed. For which reason they took their whisky hot, and hallowed by the gentler name of "toddy." At even-

tide they took it, within the sacred precincts of their own firesides, and immediately after family worship. Many a time and oft the very lips which fervently sang the psalm —

"Like Hermon's dew, the dew that doth,"

were the same that sampled Sanderson's with solemn satisfaction.

The session clerk once presented to the court a letter from a worthy but wandering temperance orator, craving permission to give his celebrated "dog talk" in St. Cuthbert's on a Sabbath afternoon.

"I move that the kirk be no' granted," said Archie M'Cormack. "He'll be revilin' the ways o' men far abune him. Ma faither aye took a drappy ilka nicht, haudin' his bonnet in his haun' the while. He wad drink the health o' Her Majesty ('God bless her,' he aye said), and mebbe ane to the auld kirk in bonnie Scotland, an' mebbe ane to the laddies wha used to rin wi' him aboot the braes, an' mebbe then he wad hae jist ane mair to Her Majesty, for ma faither was aye uncommon loyal at the hinner end. But atween him an' ma mither he aye kent fine when to stop.

"An' a' oor faithers tasted afore they gaed to bed, an' they a' dee'd wi' their faces to the licht; an' I wadna gie ane o' them for a wheen o' yir temperance haverers wi' their dog talks on the Sabbath day."

"I second that," said Ronald M'Gregor. "The injudeecious use o' speerits, or o' ony ither needcessity, is no' to be commendit, but the Sabbath he's askin' 'll be the sacrament, and that's no day for dog talkin', I'm thinkin' "—and the motion carried unanimously.

* * * * * *

"How's the ice to-day?" I asked Thomas Laidlaw, one winter's afternoon.

"Fair graun'," replied the solemn Thomas. "Ye'll never throw a stane on better till ye draw by yir last gaird; 'twad dae fine for the New Jerusalem."

"You don't think there'll be curling there, Thomas?" I said.

"I dinna ken," he answered, "but I'm no' despairin'. They aye speak o't as a land where everlasting spring abides; but I hae ma doots. There'll be times when the ice'll hold, I'm thinkin'. Yon crystal river's no' for naethin'."

Geordie Lorimer was my skip that day, and soon the armoured floor was echoing to the "roarin' game," the largest, noblest, brotherliest game known to mortal men. The laird and the cottar were there, the homely shepherd and the village snab who cobbled his shoes, the banker and the carter, the manufacturer and the mechanic—all on that oft-quoted platform which is built alone of curlers' ice.

"Lay me a pat-lid richt here, man. Soop her up —soop, soop, man. Get her by the gaird. Let her be. I'm wrang, bring her ben the hoose. Stop—stop, I'm tellin' ye. Noo, soop, soop her in, man."

"Noo, minister, be up this time," cries Geordie. "Soop, soop her up. That's a graun' yin, minister. Shake ye yir ain haun'. Gin yir sermons were deleevered like yir stanes, there wadna be an empty seat i' the kirk. Lat her dee, she's ower fiery. That'll dae fine for a gaird, an' Tam'll be fashed to get roun' ye."

Thus roared the game along, and at its close Geordie and I were putting our stones away together, flushed with victory. The occasion seemed favourable for the moral influence which it was my constant aim to exercise.

"By the way, Geordie," I began, "I have not seen you in the kirk of late."

"What's that?" said Geordie, his invariable challenge, securing time to adjust himself for the encounter.

"I have missed you nearly all winter from the church on the Sabbath day," I replied, leaving no room for further uncertainty.

Geordie capitulated slowly: "I'll grant ye I've no' been by-ord'nar regglar," he admitted, "but I hae a guid excuse. I haena been ower weel. Ma

knee's been sair. To tell ye the truth, minister, half the time 'twas a' I could dae to get doon to curl."

I sighed heavily and said no more, for Geordie was hopelessly sincere in his idea of first things first.

The very next night I was sitting quietly in my study, talking to Margaret and Angus, though I was beginning to suspect already that they had come to endure my absence with heroic fortitude.

About eleven o'clock the door-bell rang, and I answered it myself. It was Geordie's distracted wife. Leading her to the drawing-room, I asked her mission, though her pale and care-rung face left little room for doubt.

"Wad ye think it bold o' me, sir, gin I was to ask you to find Geordie an' fetch him hame? He's off sin' yestere'en."

"Why, it was only yesterday evening I saw him on the ice."

"Ay, sir, but he winned the game, an' that's aye a loss for Geordie; he aye tak's himsel' to the tavern when he wins. Oh, sir, ma hairt's fair broken; it's a twalmonth this verra nicht sin' oor wee Jessie dee'd, an' I was aye lippenin' to that to bring him till himsel'; but he seems waur nor ever—he seeks to droon his sorrow wi' the drink."

I had often marvelled at this; for Geordie's last

word to his little daughter had been a promise to meet her in the land o' the leal. But it is not chains alone that make a slave.

After a little further conversation, I sent the poor woman home, assuring her that I would do the best I could for Geordie. Which promise I proceeded to fulfill. Two or three of his well-known resorts had been visited with fruitless quest, when I repaired to the Maple Leaf, a notoriously sunken hole, which thus blasphemed the name of the fairest emblem of the nations. I observed a few sorry wastrels leaning in maudlin helplessness upon the bar as I pressed in, still cleaving to their trough—but Geordie was not among them. I was about to withdraw, when I heard a familiar voice, above the noise of a phonograph, from one of the rooms just above the bar. It was Geordie's.

"Gie us 'Nearer, my God, to Thee,'" I heard him cry, with drunken unction. "Gin ye haena ane o' the psalms o' Dauvit i' yir kist o' tunes, mak' the creetur play 'Nearer, my God, to Thee.'"

Here was Geordie's evil genius in evidence again, his profligacy and his piety hand in hand. Ascending the stairs, I reached the door just in time to see the landlord, manipulator of the musical machine, forcing Geordie to the door, one hand gripping his throat, the other buffeting the helpless wretch in the

face. Two or three of his unspeakable kindred were applauding him.

"Get out of here, you beast," he muttered savagely, "and let decent folk enjoy themselves. You'll not get no music nor no whisky either, hangin' round an honest man's house without a penny in your pocket—get out, you brute." And he struck him full in the face again.

It were wrong to say that I forgot I was a minister; I think I recalled that very thing, and it gave more power to my arm, for I knew the poverty amid which Geordie's poor wife strove to keep their home together; and the pitiful bareness of wee Jessie's death-chamber flashed before me. This well-nourished vampire had sucked the life-blood from them all, and remembering this, I rushed into the unequal conflict and smote the vampire between his greedy eyes with such fervour that he fell where he stood. In a moment he was on his feet again, but my ministry with him was not complete, and I seized him where he had gripped his own victim, by the throat.

"Let me be. Remember you're a minister," he gasped.

"God forbid I should forget," I thundered back, for my blood was hot. I remembered just then that wee Jessie had been dependent on charity for the

little delicacies that go with death; "and if God helps me you won't forget it either," with which addition I hurled him down the stairs, his final arrival signalled back by the sulphurous aroma of bruised and battered maledictions.

It may be incidentally inserted here that this unclerical encounter of mine was afterwards referred to at a meeting of St. Cuthbert's session. One of the elders, never very friendly to me, preferred the charge of conduct unbecoming a minister. Only two of his colleagues noticed the indictment, and they both were elders of the old Scotch school.

"Oor minister's fine at the castin' doon o' the strongholds o' Satan," said the one; "it minds me o' what the beasts got i' the temple."

"It's mebbe no' Solomon's exact words, but it's gey like them: 'A time to pit on the goon an' a time to tak' aff the coat'—an' it's the yae kin' o' proheebeetion that's ony guid forbye," said the other.

The groaning landlord was soon removed by the loving hands of his wife and the hostler; and as I convoyed Geordie out past their family sitting-room, tenderly so called, the phonograph breathed out the last expiring strains of "Wull ye no' come back again?" which the aforesaid landlord had selected in preference to Geordie's pious choice.

Measures for the sufferer's relief had been swift;

the air was already rich with the fumes of high wines, the versatile healer of internal griefs and external wounds alike.

When Geordie and I were well upon the street a new difficulty presented itself.

"It's a sair shock, an' it'll kill the wife," I heard him muttering beneath his breath.

This gave me some little hope, for I detected in it the beauty of penitence.

"Your wife will forgive you, Geordie," I began; "and if this will only teach ——"

But he stopped me; his face showed that he had been sorely misunderstood.

"Forgie me—forgie me! It's no' me she'll hae till forgie. Are ye no' the minister o' St. Cuthbert's? Ah, ye canna deny that. I ken that fine. I kent ye as sune as ye cam' slippin' ben the taivern. It'll fair kill the wife."

"What are you talking about?" I said testily.

"To think I wad live to see my ain minister slippin' by intil a taivern at sic a time o' nicht," he groaned despondingly.

Then he turned upon me, his voice full of sad reproof: "I'm no' what I micht be masel', but I dinna mak' no profession; but to think I'd catch my ain minister hangin' roon' a taivern at this time o' nicht. It'll kill the wife. She thocht the warld o' ye."

What the man was driving at was slowly borne in upon me.

"But you do not understand, Geordie," I began.

He stopped me again: "Dinna mak' it waur wi' yir explanations. I un'erstaun' fine. I un'erstaun' noo why they ca' ye a feenished preacher—ye're damn weel feenished for me an' Betsy. An' gin I tell hoo I fun' ye oot (which I'm no' sayin' I'll dae), ilka sate i' the kirk will be empty the comin' Sabbath day. Ye're a wolf in sheep's claes, an' I'm sair at hairt the nicht."

I saw the uselessness of any attempt to enlighten him, for he was evidently sincere in his illusion, and the spirit of real grief could be detected, mingling with another which poisoned the air at every breath. Whereupon I left him to himself as we walked along, Geordie swaying gently, overcome by the experiences of the departed hour.

"It maun hae a fearfu' haud o' ye when ye cam' oot at sic an oor," he said at length, half to himself. "But it clean spiled a graun' nicht for me to see ye slippin' ben. It was a graun' nicht up till that. I canna jist mind if it was a funeral or a weddin'—but it was fair graun'. We drinkit the health o' ane anither till there wasna ache or pain amangst us, but this spiles it a' for me. An' it'll kill the wife."

"You will see it differently," I could not help but say; "you know well how I have tried to help you and tried to comfort your poor wife."

"That's what I aye thocht till noo," he responded plaintively. "I was sayin' that same thing this verra nicht to ane o' my freens at the taivern afore ye cam'. It was auld Tam Rutherford, wha's gaun to be mairrit again, and him mair nor auchty years o' age. I warnt him against it, an' I telt him his ither wumman was deid but sax months. But Tam said as hoo a buddy at his age canna afford to wait ower lang, an' I didna ken what answer to gie to that."

Then Geordie stopped, evidently resuming the quest for an appropriate reply; for Scotch wit is usually posthumous, their responses serial and their arguments continued in their next.

I was naturally curious as to what part I could have had in this discussion, and since Geordie seemed to have forgotten the original subject, I asked, "What has that to do with my trying to help or comfort anybody?"

"Ou ay," he resumed. "Tam was sayin' as hoo he'd no' hae yirsel' to mairry them, for he said ye're ower affectionate wi' the brides. But I stuck up for you. I telt him yir sympathies was braid, but ye didna pick oot the lassies for it a'. I was at Wullie Lee's the nicht Wullie dee'd; an' I was fair scun-

nert at the elders. There was twa o' them, an' they prayed turn aboot.

"When Wullie slippit awa, at midnight his twa dochters, Kirsty an' Ann, took on redeek'lus, an' the auld wumman was waur. But the twa elders sat an oor, comfortin' the twa lassies, ane to ilka ane, an' baith o' them no' bad to luik at. They comfortit them muckle the same as I comfortit Betsy when we did oor coortin', but the puir auld buddy was left her lane wi' naebody to comfort her ava. I did it masel' a wee while. That's what I telt Tam, an' I pinted oot the difference atween you an' the elders. I said as hoo ye wad hae pickit oot the auld buddy first—— But to think ma ain een saw ye comin' ben the taivern ayont twal o'clock at nicht."

With such varied discourse did Geordie beguile our homeward way, which at last brought us to his dwelling-place.

"I want ye to promise me ae thing afore we pairt," said Geordie. "It's for yir ain guid I'm askin' it."

"What is it?" I asked curiously.

"I want ye to sign the pledge," he responded, with a tearful voice, "for it maun hae a sair haud o' ye or ye wadna be prowlin' aboot a taivern at sic a time o' nicht."

"I will talk to you some other time about that."

"Weel, weel, jist as ye wull—it'll dae again—but

man, hoo'll ye square it wi' the wife when ye gang hame to the manse the nicht? We'll baith hae oor ain times, I'm dootin'. Here's a sweetie for ye; it's a peppermint lozenge, an' it's a graun' help. Guid-nicht."

I had taken but forty steps or so when a solicitous voice called out, "Lie wi' yir back to the wife—an' sip the sweetie—an' breathe in to yersel'."

XVII

"NOO, The IN-TURN"

THE Apostles' Creed should be revised. One great article of faith it lacks. "I believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting"—thus peal its bells of gold. But where is the faithful and observant minister who would not add, "I believe in the change of the leopard's spots and of the Ethiopian's skin"? Nowadays, we speak of conversion with pity and amusement, but it is the greatest word the Christian Church can boast, and the Scripture miracles were long ago entombed had they not lived again in their legitimate descendants.

We are prone to think that men believe in modern miracles because of those of long ago—but the reverse is true: the modern miracles are the attestation of those early wonders; and I myself believe the Galilean records because of His credentials in this Western World and in this present day.

The very morning after the eventful night described above, I was busy at my desk, travailing in birth with my sermon for the next Sabbath morning.

Strangely enough, it was from the words, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible?" which is at heart no interrogative at all, but the eternal affirmative of all religion, the basis of all faith, the inevitable corollary of God.

I was casting about for a fitting illustration, fumbling in imagery's twilight chamber and ransacking the halls of history, when lo! God sent one knocking at the door. I responded to the knock myself, and Geordie Lorimer stood before me. His face seemed strangely chastened, and the voice which craved a private interview filled me somehow with subtle hope and joy. For the voice is the soul's great index; and this of Geordie's spoke of a soul's secret convalescence. The breath of spring exuded from his words.

I locked my study door as we passed in together; for a Protestant confessional is a holy place, excelling far the Catholic, even as a love-letter excels a bill of lading.

"What is it, Geordie?" I asked, with tender eagerness.

"I dinna ken exactly, but I think it's life," he answered with new-born passion, "and eternal life at that. I canna tell it an' I canna thole it till I do tell it. I maunna mak' ower free wi' God; but it's my soul, minister, it's my soul, an' I'm a new creature.

I'm new in the sicht o' God an' He's new in mine—an' I prayed this mornin', a thing I haena dune for mair than twenty years—an' the auld burn was sweet an' clear, like when my laddie's lips sippit there lang syne—I daurna speak His name ower often, but God is gey guid to the sinfu' an' the weary."

"None but they can know how good," was my response.

My remark seemed to pass unnoticed, for Geordie had more to say.

"Hark ye, an' I'll tell ye hoo God cam' to me. 'Twas near the dawn this verra mornin' I had a dream, an' wee Jessie cam' to me. An' that was God, nae ither ane but God. 'Oot o' the mooth o' babes,' is that no' i' the Buik? For wee Jessie stood beside the bed, an' I luikit at her an' I said, 'My little dochter.' 'Twas a' I could say, an' she pit her saft haun' on my heid sae gentle, an' sae blessed cool, for my heid was burnin' hot. She luikit lang, an' her een was fu' o' love: 'Faither,' she said, 'did ye no' promise yir lassie to meet her in the Faither's hoose? Oh, faither, I've come to mind ye o' yir promise an' to set yir puir feet upon the path ance mair. God loves ye, faither; I hae it frae Himsel'; an' there's mony a ane wi' Him noo in white wha wandered farther bye nor you. An' God 'll try, gin ye'll try yirsel', an' yir wee Jessie 'll no' be far frae ye.

Wull ye no' come, faither? for yir ain lassie, an' mither, an' God, a' want ye.'

"I luikit lang intil her angel face, but I was feart to speak, for I wasna worthy. The road was bricht eneuch, but I wasna fit to gang.

"'I ken what yir thinkin' o', faither. I ken yir enemy—an' God kens. It's the drink. But it'll pass yir lips nae mair. I'll kiss them, faither, an' they'll burn wi' the awfu' thirst nae mair.'

"An' she stoopit doon an' kissed my burnin' lips; an' I waukit up, an' the fever was a' past an' by. I tell't Betsy, an' she grat wi' joy. 'It's i' the Buik,' she said.

"'What's i' the Buik?' I speirt.

"'A little child shall lead them,' Betsy said."

I talked a little while with Geordie as one talks with a shipwrecked sailor who has gained the shore. He asked me to pray.

"Mak' it easy," he said, "I'm no' far ben the Mystery yet. I'm but a bairn; but my lips are pure, an' the fever's by."

We knelt together, and I prayed: "O Friend of sinners, help us both, for we are both sinners. Keep us, blessed Lord, and let his little daughter be near us both to help us on the way. We will both try our best, and Thou wilt too. Amen."

My half-written sermon never has been finished.

I was constrained to take another text, and the next Sabbath morn I saw Betsy Lorimer bow her head in reverent adoration when I gave it out —

"Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister?"

XVIII

HOW ELSIE WON The GATE

THE forest's glory is departed when its giant trees lie low. And, stroke by stroke, my St. Cuthbert's Kirk was thus bereft of its outstanding glories. For great men are like great trees, the shelter of all others and the path-finders towards the sky.

My sun is westering now, and the oft-repeated crash as these mighty stalwarts fall keeps my heart in almost abiding sadness. For the second growth gives no promise of a stock which shall be worthy successors to these noble pioneers, the conquering gladiators of Canada's shadowy forests, the real makers of her great and portentous national life. And yet, strange to say, I never knew their real greatness while I lived among them, sharing in the varied chase, but only when they came to die.

This was especially true of those who boasted far-back highland blood, for their depths of tenderness and heights of faith and scope of spiritual vision were sternly hidden till the helplessness of death betrayed them. Then was the key to their secret life surrendered; then might all men see the face at the pane.

But not till then; for every stolid feature, every stifled word or glance of tenderness, every muffled note of religious self-revealment, swelled their life's noble perjury. To their own hurt they swore, changing not. But at their real best he saw them who saw them die.

In that ingenuous hour they spoke once more their mother tongue of love and faith with an accuracy which told of lifelong rehearsal within their secret hearts. When the golden bowl was broken, its holy contents, flowing free, poured forth the long-imprisoned fragrance.

How many a day, cold and gray, flowers at sunset into rich redemptive beauty, cheerless avenue leading to its grand Cathedral West! Thus have I seen these Scottish lives, stern and cold and rayless, break into flame at evening, in whose light I caught the glory of the very gates of the City of God.

It was the winter of the strike, whose story I have already told, that Elsie M'Phatter heard the Voice which calls but once. Long and gentle had been the slope towards the river, and I held Elsie's hand every step of the way, myself striving to hold that other Hand which is truly visible only in the darkness; but the last stage of the journey came swift and suddenly. About two in the morning I was awakened by the loud alarm of my door-bell.

The minister knows well that at such an hour his bell is rung only by eternal winds, and the alarm is an almost certain message that the rapids are near and that he is wanted at the helm. On Atlantic liners I have never heard the ominous note that calls the captain from his cabin to the bridge without thinking of my midnight bell, and that deeper darkness, and that more awful channel.

It was the doctor's boy who thus summoned me, bidding me hurry to Elsie's bedside, for the tide was ebbing fast, he said. I was soon on my way through the frosty night, silently imploring the unseen Pilot that He would safe into the haven guide. To His great wisdom and His sheltering love I committed all the case, making oath beneath the silent stars that I had myself no other hope than this with which I hurried to yonder dying one. For a man's own heart must swear by the living Lord, or else he will find no path through the dread wilderness of death for the unreturning feet.

When the outskirts of the town were but well behind me, I saw in the distance a solitary light which I knew at once to be the death-chamber lamp; at sight whereof my heart has never outgrown a strange leap of trembling fear, like a scout when he catches the first warning gleam of the enemy's camp-fire. Yonder, I said to myself, is the battle-field of a

soul, struggling with its last great foe; yonder the central crisis of all time and all eternity; yonder the heaving breast, the eager, onward look, the unravelling of mystery, the launching of a soul upon eternal seas.

No life is ever commonplace when that lamp burns beside it, and no wealth, or genius, or greatness can palliate its relentless gleam. There, continued I, stands the dread unseen Antagonist, asking no chair, demanding no courtesy, craving no welcome, resenting no frowning and averted face; calmly does he brook the terror and the hatred excited by his uninvited advent, serene in the confidence that his is the central figure, that the last word is his, though all pretend to ignore his presence. Like a sullen creditor he stands, careless that every man's hand is against him, relentlessly following his prey, willing that all others should wait his time and theirs, intent only that this night shall have its own.

And yet, I thought, what a false picture is this that my coward heart hath drawn! There is Another in that room, I cried half loud, Another there before me, whose swift feet have outrun my poor trudging through the snow. For He is there who lit that feeble lamp itself, and it burns only by His will. Death-lamp though it be, it is still a broken light of Him, witness, in its own dark way, to the All-kind-

ling Hand. The Lover of the soul is yonder, and will share His dear-bought victory with my poor dying one.

Whereat I pressed on eagerly, for I love to witness a reprieve, such as many a time it hath been mine to see when the Greater Antagonist prevails.

The death damp was on Elsie's brow when I knelt beside her bed, but her eyes were kindled from afar, and a great Presence filled the room. Donald was bowed beside her, his wife's wasted hand clasped passionately in his own.

I knelt over the dying woman and softly repeated the swelling anthem which no lips can sing aright till the great Vision quickens them: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Elsie's voice blended with the great words, and turning her lustrous eyes full on my face, she murmured —

"It's a' bricht and blythesome whaur I'm walkin' noo—there's no valley here nor nae glen ava, but the way is fu' o' licht and beauty."

Her eyes sought her husband's face: "Oh, Donal'! To think we canna walk this way thegither! We've clomb the hill thegither, Donal', mony a time sair an' weary, but oor hairts were stoot when the brae was

stae; but noo I've reached the bonnie bit ayont the brae, an' ye're a' 'at's wantin', Donal', to mak' it fair beautiful! But ye'll no' be lang ahint me, wull ye, Donal'?—an' the Maister 'll come back to guide ye, gin I'm gone bye the gate. An' we'll aye walk thegither in the yonner-land."

Donald's face was dry, but drawn in its agony. Its ache passed on into my soul. He bent over her like some bowing oak, and the rustle of love's foliage was fairly audible to the inward ear, though the oak itself seemed hard and gnarled as ever. He whispered something, like a mighty organ lilting low and sweet some mother's lullaby, and no tutor except Great Death could have taught Donald that gentle language. For I caught the word "darling," and again "oor Saviour," and once "the hameland," and it was like a lark's gentlest note issuing from a mighty mountain's cleft.

O Death, how unjustly thou hast been maligned! Men have painted thee as cruel, monstrous, hateful, the enemy of love, the despoiler of the home, the spirit of harshness, the destroyer of all poesy and romance. And yet thou hast done more to fill life with softness and with gentle beauty than all the powers of life and light whose antagonist thou hast been called. Thou hast heaped coals of fire on thy traducers' heads. For hast thou not made the

heaviest foot fall lightly with love's considerate tread? Hast thou not made the rough, coarse palm into a sanctuary and pavilion wherein the dying hand may shelter? Hast thou not taught the loud and boisterous voice the new song of tenderness and pity, whispering like a dove? Within thy school the rude and harsh have learned the nurse's gentle art, and the world's swaggering warriors serve as acolytes before thy shadowy altar. The peasant's cottage owes to thee its transformation to cathedral splendour, the censers gently swinging when thou sayest the soul's great mass, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning. Thou hast classed together the hovel and the palace, glowing with equal solemn grandeur, so that no man can tell the one from the other when the crape upon the door betokens that thou tarriest there. Thou hast promoted sodden sleep to be the most awful metaphor of time. Thou hast stripped wealth and grandeur, leaving them but a shroud, and hast clothed obscurity and poverty with their eternally suggestive robe; thou hast affirmed, and thou preserved, that grim average of life which greatness refuses, which littleness fears, to realize. Romance and Poetry and Fancy are thy wards, making as thou dost the most holden eyes to overleap time's poor horizon, following departed treasure with wistful and unresigning

love, as birds follow their ravaged nests, crying as they go. Oh, sombre chantress! Thou hast filled the world with song, plaintive and piteous though it be.

"What is it, mother?" I heard Donald whisper; and the answer evidently came back to him from the dying lips. For he turned to me, his face full of tragedy: "She's talkin' aboot Robin," he said hoarsely; "but ye dinna ken. Robin was oor laddie—an' he's oor laddie yet, though we've had nae word o' him for mony a year. Him an' me pairted in wrath, an' he went oot intil the dark nicht. I was ower prood tae ca' him back, but his mither followed him to the moor, cryin' after him—an' she cam' back alane."

Donald stopped suddenly, for the mother's struggling voice was heard: "Come hame, Robin, for it's cauld an' dark, an' ye've been ower lang awa; but there's a place at the ingle for ye yet, my bairn. I've aye keepit it for ye, an' I keepit the fire burnin' ever sin' ye left us. I wadna let it oot. An' ilka nicht I pit the lamp i' the window, for I aye thocht, 'He'll mebbe come the nicht.'"

"She's wanderin'," Donald said to me, awe mingling with his voice.

"She's found the wanderer," I said; and we both moved nearer, each signalling the other to be still.

Elsie's gaze passed us by, outgoing far into the darkness.

"Na, na, Robin; yir faither'll no' be angry. I ken fine a' ye say is true, but he's yir faither for a' that. An' he loves ye maist as weel as me; but oh, my bonnie, there's nane loves ye like yir mither! His hairt's fair broken for ye, Robin. I'll tell ye something, but ye maunna tell yir faither. I heard him pray for ye all alane by himsel'. He prayed to God to bring ye back—he ca'd ye Robin richt to God. An' I never heard yir faither greet afore or syne. The Buik, tae, it wad open o' itsel' at the prodigal, an' it was his daein', an' he didna think I kent; but I kent it fine, an' I thankit the Heavenly Faither mony a time."

She stopped, exhausted, her soul flickering in her voice. Donald moved, his great form coming athwart her eager, kindling eyes. She stirred, her vision evidently hindered, and Donald stepped quickly from before her, gazing with passionate intentness, his eyes shaded by his hand like one who peers into a lane of light.

"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will —" I began.

"Hush!" said Donald sternly, "she's wi' him yet. Hark ye!"

Her strength seemed now returning, for she went on —

"Ay, Robin, I'm tellin' ye the truth. Yir faither's thocht o' ye is the thocht he had when ye were a bit bairn in his airms."

The anguished father flung himself upon his knees beside the bed, his hand gently stroking his wife's withered cheek.

"Tell him that again, mither; tell him my thocht o' him was aye the same as yir ain, when I thocht o' him atween God an' me. Tell him me an' you baith thocht the same. Bid him hame, Elsie. Oh, mither, I've been the wanderer masel', an' I'm weary."

My heart melted in me at this, for the eternal fatherly was sobbing through his voice.

The familiar tones seemed to call Elsie back from her delirium, for she suddenly looked upon us as if we had not been there before.

"Oh, faither, Robin's comin' hame the nicht. Is the lamp kindled in the window? We've baith been wae these mony years, but the mirk'll be past an' by when oor laddie's safe hame wi' us again."

A strange sense of the nearness of the supernatural took possession of me, for Elsie's voice was not the voice of fevered fancy; the fast ebbing tide of life seemed to flow back again, her strength visibly increased, as if she must remain till her Robin had been welcomed home.

In spite of reason, I fell to listening eagerly, won-

dering if this were indeed the act of God. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with us that the Rebuilder of Bethany's desolated house should still ply His ancient industry?

"Raise me up a little, faither, for I maun watch the gate."

Donald lifted his dying wife with caressing easiness.

"That'll dae; ay, we've baith been wae these mony years, but the mirk is bye.

> "'Long hath the night of sorrow reigned,
> The dawn shall bring us light.'

The morn is wi' us, Donal', an' Robin's at the gate."

Far past the flickering lamp she gazed, and her eyes' light rose and fell in unison with approaching steps.

"He's bye the gate," she cried; and joy held death at bay, for the words chimed like cathedral bells.

Fearsome to behold was the awestruck face which Donald turned to mine, and full of questioning dread, I doubt not, were the eyes that met his own. Was this the doing of the Lord, or was it but the handiwork of death, that wizard oculist, so often lending mystic vision to pilgrims setting under darkness out to sea?

Leaving death and Elsie to their unequal conflict,

we started with one impulse to the window; but Donald was there before me, his eyes shaded by his hands, burning through the dark a pathway to the gate.

"God be mercifu'," he muttered, and then turned swiftly towards the stairs, for a hand was fumbling at the latch. I waited trembling, and I heard no word; but the aroma of a soul's second spring stole sweet and unafraid into the chamber of death.

* * * * * *

I met them at the door as Donald said, "Yir mither's deein'," and there broke from the rugged man beside him a low moaning sound, like to many waters when some opposing thing hath at length been overswept. It was quickly checked, and the silence of love and anguish took its place.

I drew Donald gently back and closed the door upon them twain, the waiting mother and the wandering son, for there was never bridal hour like to this.

"My mither, oh, my mither!" I heard him say; and Elsie spoke no word, but the long ache was ended and the great wound was well.

'Twas but a moment again when a trembling voice called, "Faither, she's wantin' ye."

We entered the love-lit room, and Elsie beckoned him swiftly to her side.

"I maun be gaun sune," she whispered, and then followed some words too low for my ears to catch.

Donald turned to me: "She wants to hae the sacrament dispensit till us a'," and his face was full of dubious entreaty, for the kirk session of St. Cuthbert's was sternly set against private administration.

The session and its rules were in that moment to me but as the dust. Beyond their poor custody was a holy hour such as this. The little table was quickly spread, the snow-white bread and the wine pressed by a mother's priestly hands. I was about to proceed with the holy ordinance when Elsie stopped me.

"Bide a meenit. Donal', get ye the token, the ane wee Elsie loved. My hairt tells me she's no' far awa the noo. She'll e'en show forth the Lord's deith alang wi' us. The Maister o' the feast is here, and why wad He no' bring oor Elsie wi' Him? Wha kens but I'll gang hame wi' them baith?"

Her husband, obedient to the seer's voice, passed quickly to an adjoining room, and in an instant reappeared, bearing the well-worn token in his hands, the same his dying child had fondly held; and I heard again the low refrain which grief had taught him years ago: "Christ an' oor Elsie—an' her mither." This last was new, learned in sorrow's latest hour.

He handed it to his wife, who took it, turning her wan face to mine.

"There's only ane, but it'll dae us a'—let Robin haud it. Tak' it, laddie; it's warm frae yir sister's haun'."

The wanderer's reverent hand received it, and holy memories, long banished, flowed back into the heart that had not been their home since the golden days of boyhood. Of his mother and his sister were they all, and they laved that heart till it was almost clean, for they were in disguise but memories of God, foreshadowing the Greater Incarnation.

"Noo we're ready, an' we're a' here. Raise the psalm, faither, the sacrament ane," she said faintly—"tak' St. Paul's," and Donald's quavering voice essayed—

> "I'll of salvation take the cup,
> On God's name will I call;
> I'll pay my vows now to the Lord
> Before His people all.
>
> * * * * * *
>
> Dear in God's sight is His saints' death,
> Thy servant, Lord"—

but the faltering voice refused.

I broke the bread and poured the wine, handing the sacred emblems first to the dying one, so soon to take them new in the kingdom of God. Then Donald partook, and buried his face in his hands. To Robin

next I proffered the holy symbols, but he drew back, stretching forth his hands towards the bed.

"I daurna—I've wandered ower far," he said. "I hear the russlin' o' the husks."

"Dinna fear, Robin," whispered his mother's lips. "We're a' but bairns comin' back to oor Faither's hoose; God loves ye mair than either yir faither or me,—I'm near the kingdom, an' I ken."

"My son, my laddie,"—it was his father's broken voice,—"let us tak' the feast thegither. I'm a puir prodigal masel'—but the door is open wide, an' we'll baith come hame to God."

"I'll tak' it frae ma mither's hands," said Robin.

I handed the elements to her, ordained from all eternity to minister to the son she bore; with trembling hands she dispensed them to him, high priestess unto God, her dying eyes distilling the very love which shed its fragrance when the all but dying Saviour first brake the holy bread.

When we were through, Elsie's voice was heard saying to herself "Unto Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood," which was followed by a long silence.

"Wull ye no' pronounce the benediction?" Donald said at last, for he was by nature an ecclesiastic.

"Did you not hear it?" I replied.

The silence deepened, the breathing grew heavier,

and we two stood together looking down upon her face. Robin's was by his mother's. Suddenly her eyes opened wide, fastening themselves upon her son.

"I'll sune win hame," she murmured gladly, "an' I want ye to say yir bit prayer to me, Robin, afore I gang, the way ye did when ye were a bairnie. Kneel doon, Robin, an' say it to me, an' we'll baith say it to God, for I'm weary tae. 'Noo I lay me,' ye ken."

The strong man bowed beside his mother's bed, and the great anthem began, the sobbing bass of the broken heart mingling with the feeble dying voice—

> "Now I lay me down to sleep,
> I pray Thee Lord my soul to keep;
> If I should die before I wake,
> I pray Thee Lord my soul to take."

Suddenly she pointed with uplifted hand: "Oh, faither, I see oor Elsie's face—an' the token's in her haun', an' it's a' bricht wi' gowden licht. She's biddin' us a' hame—me, an' faither, an' Robin ——" and she passed into the homeland bearing the prodigal's name with her up to God.

I gently closed her eyes. Donald stood long beside the bed; then, taking his son into his arms, he said—

"Yir mither's bye the gate."

XIX

A MAIDEN'S LOVE

WHAT self-contradicting things we are! The very joys we crave bring sorrow when they come; for they crowd out some only lesser joy, which, rejected, turns to bitterness and takes its long revenge. It is one of the blessed laws of life that no heart, however hospitable, can entertain more than one sorrow at one time, how many so ever be waiting at the door. Each must wait its turn.

But alas! Joy has its corresponding law; every heart's pleasure is an alternative, and if much we would enjoy, much also we must renounce. Joy usually comes as twins, and the great perplexity is to discern which the first-born is, that our homage may not return unto us void.

Of many of our deepest longings may it not be said that their fulfillment would be our keenest disappointment? For instance, the wife of our family physician is forever lamenting that no spouse in all New Jedboro sees as little of her husband as does she, forever longing that he might be released to the enjoyment of his own fireside. Yet should a fickle

or convalescent public suddenly so release him, our doctor's wife would be of all women most miserable.

Even as I write, I am disturbed by a lad of twenty who starts to-day on his long journey to Athabasca and the waiting prairies of our great Canadian West.

Full of pathetic joy is his youthful face; but his mother is bowed beside the bed whereon she gave him birth—her cup, she thinks, would be full to overflowing if her first-born son were suddenly to dispack his box and take up the old nestling life again. The sun would have turned back to its undimmed meridian, she weens; and yet she knows full well that this very longing, were it gratified, would poison her overflowing cup and tarnish her mother's pride. If she were asked to choose between these two, womanlike, she would elect to have them both—but God forbids.

The youth's father says: "Let the lad go forth"—and God is a Father, though He takes counsel of a mother-heart.

All this reflective vein flows from this poor heart of mine, the truth whereof that heart hath sorrowfully proved.

For my daughter Margaret holds within it a place of solitary tenderness, more exclusively her own as the years go by. And I too was forced to the great alternative, the same which hath wrung uncounted

parents' hearts before I saw the light, the same as will rend thousands more when that poor light has filtered through darkness into Day.

What father is there who can contemplate without dismay the prospect of his only daughter surrendered to another's care, though that other press the cruel claim of a mate's more passionate love? Where is the father that does not long to shelter his child's sweet innocence forever within the pavilion of his heart's loving tenderness? And yet, where is the father who would be free from torture, were he assured that his soul's yearning would be satisfied, and that no high claim of unrelated love would ever rival or dispute his own?

It was my own fault that Margaret's attachment to Angus Strachan came to me as a bolt from the blue. I had never dreamed of it—I was so sure of everybody loving Margaret that I never thought of anybody loving her. Of course it was easily seen that their friendship was mutually cherished; but friendship, although a mother's hope, is a father's reassurance. Margaret's mother had more than once spoken of their friendship in that portentous tone which all women hope to assume before they die; and her words exuded the far-off fragrance of orange blossoms. She began with the assurance that the friendship between Angus and our Margaret had no par-

ticular meaning—to which I agreed. A little later on she ventured the remark that she did not think Angus cared for Margaret except as a friend—to which also I cheerfully agreed. Later still, she resorted to the interrogative, and asked me if I thought Margaret would ever marry, to which I answered: "I hope so, but she shall not with my consent."

"I was married when I was Margaret's age," added my wife. (What woman is there who does not love to say the same?) "Margaret will soon be twenty."

"Yes, my dear, but few women have the chance that came to you and no man ever had provocation like to mine." This was followed by a passage at arms, during which, of course, the fair debater's lips were sealed.

By degrees my wife's attack upon the subject grew bolder and more frontal.

"Do you think Margaret cares anything for Angus?" she asked, the hour being that post-retiring one sacred in every age to conjugal conference.

"I don't think so—certainly not; why should she? We have a triangular family altogether—two to each of us, and why should she want any more? She has you and me, just as I have you and her, and you have her and me."

"But that is foolish; you don't understand."

"I don't want to understand," I answered drowsily. "Margaret's only a child—and I want to go to sleep; if I don't sleep over my sermon to-night, the people will to-morrow." For it was Saturday night.

But "the child" was not asleep. The love affairs of other hearts are by others easily borne, even though those others be the next nearest and dearest of all. But how different with the maiden's heart that loves, and tremblingly hopes that it loves not in vain! Then doth the pillow burn with holy passion, and considerate sleep, like an indulgent nurse, turns her steps aside, fearing to break in upon the soul's solemn revelry. Even when she ventures nigh, gently withdrawing the still unwearied heart from its virgin joy, do the half open lips still sip from the new found cisterns of sweet and tender bliss.

O holy love! Who shall separate the joy thou bringest from the heart that opens wide to welcome it, even as the flower bares its bosom to the sun?

Darkness and tears and sorrow may follow fast; fears and misgivings and dread discoveries may come close upon thy train; broken-heartedness and bleak perpetual maidenhood may be thine only relics; or, flowering with the years, the thorns of grief and poverty and widowhood may grow where youthful fancy looked for radiant flowers; the heart which echoed with thy bridal song may yet peal forth the Rachel

cry—but thou belongest to the heart forever, and none of these can dispossess the soul of its unforgotten transport. Nor fire, nor flood, nor fraud can prevail against thee! Thy treasures moth and rust doth not corrupt nor thieves break through and steal!

As a burning building lends its heat to all beside it, so was my own soul kindled, half with rapture and half with anger, by the story of Margaret's passion. Father's and daughter's hearts were never pressed closer to each other than were mine and my only child's.

It was the succeeding Sunday night that Margaret, in her father's arms, breathed out the tender tale; I was enjoying my evening smoke (a post-sermonic anodyne), but long before Margaret had finished, my cigar was in ashes and my heart in flame.

"Father," she began, her face hidden on my shoulder, "I am either very happy or very wretched, and I cannot decide which till I know which you will be."

"The old problem, daughter, is it not?" I answered. "Still longing to enter a hospital? And you want to wheedle your old father into giving you up?" for Margaret, like every other modern girl, had been craving entrance to that noble calling. The high-born and the love-lorn, those weary of life, or of love, or both, find a refuge there.

"No, father, I was not thinking of that at all. I don't want to be a nurse any more."

"What is it then? You have never had any secrets from your father and you will not have any now, will you, dear one?"

"Oh, father, I will tell you all I can—but I cannot tell you all."

I started in my chair, for the child note was absent from her words, and the passion of womanhood was in its stead. Awesome to a father's heart is that moment wherein a daughter's voice unconsciously asserts the suffrage of her soul.

"Go on, my daughter—tell me what you may," I said, for I knew now that the realm was one wherein parental authority was of no avail.

Only silence followed; her lips spoke no word, but the heaving bosom had a rhetoric all its own and told me that a new life, begotten not of mine, was throbbing there. An alien life it seemed to me, a soul's expansion beyond the province of my own, an infinitude which denied the sway of even a father's love. At length she spoke:

"Oh, father, I will tell you all—that is, all I can. But I am so lonely. You cannot follow me, father. I have gone away in—with another—in where you cannot go."

"What mean you, Margaret? In where? Where can I not come?" I asked, perplexed.

"Father, let me tell you. I am speaking in a figure, I know—but it is the only way—and you will understand. Love is a far country, and prodigals take their journey there—but they seek it two by two. Oh, father, another one and I went off together to that far, far land and those who go leave father and mother far behind. But there is no hunger and no famine there."

Rich the endowment love bestows! While we had all thought Margaret anything but dull, yet this new speech of metaphor and music fell upon my ears as a great surprise. That live coal from off God's altar had touched her lips when first another's burning lips of love anointed them with flame. When this new sun arises, the humblest of God's meadow creatures know that the soul has wings and spread them in that holy light.

Closer to my breast I pressed the heart whose tumult, as it struggled with its muffled witnesses, started the same passionate riot in my own.

"There are many voices in your heart, daughter mine; let them speak every one and tell me all their story. Where is it that your father cannot come?"

"Father," she answered, with sweet calmness but with averted face, "I never loved you more than

now. But love's joy is in its loneliness, its sweet bridal loneliness. It was a long weary way that another one and I—you know his name, and I cannot speak it yet—walked together, but not alone together; for others walked besides us—and friendship is a cruel thing. But oh, father dear, one day—no, it was in the gloaming, we saw an avenue far beyond; and we both knew it was for us and for us alone. I saw it first, but I did not let Angus know. But he saw it in a moment and he started quickly on. Then my feet fell back, though my heart pressed on with his. But Angus would not let me stop. He hurried me on; and it was sweet to be overborne, for love makes a man so strong and a woman so weak.

"When we came close up to where you enter in, I saw that the way within was sweet, and shadowy, so shadowy, but I saw that it was long, so long. And I turned away, though my heart never turned. But Angus's eyes never moved from the avenue, and he whispered that it was meant for us two—just for us two—and for none on earth beside; he said no one could go in alone, because it would vanish if they did—and he held me close—and we went in together—and we shall come out no more forever. That is where you cannot come, father—nor mother, nor dearest friend can. You could not if you would, for it is God who keeps the gate."

Her trembling voice was still, but throbbing heart and swelling bosom still poured forth their passionate utterance.

Soon her lips opened again, yielding before the inner tide.

"And father," her hot cheek pressed to mine foretold the ardent story, "it was at evening, as I said, and Angus and I had wandered far—farther than we thought. We were resting on a grassy knoll. Angus had been speaking of his mother, and he said that the beauty of nature always made his heart ache. Surely, father, there is nothing so lonesome as beauty when the heart's lonesome! Angus and I were still a long time—till it was growing dusk; and then at last he said, 'How lonely all this is if no one loves you!' And I started at his tone, and when my eyes met his I went down before them, for they caressed me so. Father dear, I need not tell you all. I could not if I would—no girl could. I know, I remember, oh, I remember what he said, and no one else knows but me, and my soul trusted him and he took me into the sheltering place where nobody but God could see my soul's surrender."

"My daughter, my little daughter," was all I said.

"Wait, father," her face now was hidden deep and she was whispering into my very heart, "there is an-

other thing I want to tell you—no, two things, for they were both together.

"Father, he kissed me—on the lips—and I did not believe it; for just a moment before we had been listening to the crickets and looking at the sun. But he kissed me on the lips and my whole soul surged hot, and my eyes were closed—for I felt him coming and I could not speak or move.

"And I don't know why, but I thought of the sacrament and the holy wine, and everything was holy—not like music, but like a bell, a great cathedral bell with its unstained voice. And father (I shall feel purer when I tell you this), father, that very moment I felt a strange new life in my breast and the old girlish life was gone—and there came before my closed eyes a vision of another just like Angus, white and soft and helpless—and I heard its cry—and my heart melted in me with the great compassion. And I knew that what I called love was really life, just life. And I felt no shame at all, but a great pride that it was all so holy—for it is holy, father, and no one prompted it but God. Father, do you love me?"

I bent to kiss the glowing lips, but I remembered, and kissed her brow instead, beautiful and pure before my misty eyes. She drew herself gently from my arms and in a moment the sweet presence had departed. But the fragrance of love and innocence

was left behind and my faltering answer came at last, though she heard it not:

"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

XX

A FATHER'S CRUCIFIXION

IT is from joy alone that real sorrow can be brewed. Were joy to perish from the earth human lips would soon forget the bitter taste of anguish. The only intolerable clouds are those which follow swift upon some rosy morn, frowning its every sunbeam into darkness, pursuing its fugitive smiles as the hound pursues the deer. The soul's great sickness is in joy's relapse.

Into the tide of our daughter's virgin gladness her mother and I were soon gladly swept. Love and joy are incendiary things and we soon succumbed to the sweet contagion. Apart altogether from our daughter's choice, he might well have been our own; for Angus Strachan was strong of body and vigorous of mind, and pure of soul. He had made swift strides in his chosen calling, and was now a partner in one of the manufacturing firms which were New Jedboro's pride. At the door of industry he had knocked with patient hand, and wealth had answered to that knock herself. He was a man of influence, ever increasing, in New Jedboro. In St. Cuthbert's, he was held in high esteem by all, and the next election, we

knew, would call him to the elder's honoured place. Prepossessing in appearance, manly in bearing, musical in speech, fragrant in character, Angus might well wake the echoes of even our Margaret's noble heart.

Wherefore there was joy in St. Cuthbert's manse, and in its three devoted hearts, beating high with a common hope. Our morning sun shone radiantly.

But the eclipse came suddenly. It was again the Sabbath evening, and Margaret again was nestling close, her face bearing more and more the beauty which love's tuition gives.

"Father," she suddenly began, "I want to ask you something."

"What is it, child?" I said.

"You know that verse in the Bible that says:—'Who did sin, this man or his parents?' You know the verse. Well father, who did sin? Was it the man, or was it his parents?"

"What a strange question, child! What on earth has that to do with you?"

"Never mind, father—let us stick to the text," she answered. "You are a minister and I want you to stick to the text. Tell me who did sin?"

"Well, if the man's blindness was because of sin, since he was born blind and since he couldn't sin before he was born, I suppose it must have been his

parents," I answered slowly. "What difference does it make to you?" For I was curious to know.

"And don't you think," she went on unheedingly, "that it was cruel for anybody to hold that poor man responsible for his parents' sin?"

"I suppose so, but why are you catechizing me like this, burrowing among old questions of two thousand years ago?"

"Oh, father, there are no old questions," and there was a strange cry in her voice, "because there are no old lives. They are all new every day—they all live again, father. Sin is new and sorrow is new—and the Cross is new, father—so new and so cruel," she cried, the tears now flowing fast, "and that question isn't old—it is asked every day. And it is asked of me—and I have to answer it, and answer it as you have done, and as the compassionate Saviour would have done," she concluded, her voice trembling with its passion.

"What on earth do you mean, Margaret? Sin, sorrow, the Cross, what have these to do with you?" I asked eagerly.

"It was only last night that Angus told me. Poor fellow, his face was white when he came and his look was full of agony. Of course I asked him to tell me what was the matter. We were in the library, for I always took him there because it has a fireplace, and

we both love to watch the fire. I had laid the wood myself last night before Angus came, and there was never task so dear—it was the gloaming when I laid it, but I knew it would soon be bright.

"But about his answer to my question. Surely no maiden yet had so strange an answer. For, without a word, he went to the desk and took the Bible in his hands. When he had found the place he stood before me and read me this:

"'Then cometh Jesus with them unto the place called Gethsemane. . . . My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death. . . . My Father if this cup may not pass away from Me except I drink it, Thy will be done.'

"His voice was strange to me, and I was trembling for I didn't know what he meant. But I knew it was my Judgment Day.

"'Angus,' I said faintly, 'what do you mean? What has that to do with us? That is a story of two thousand years ago.'

"'Margaret,' he answered, 'the story of Gethsemane is never old. Its willows cast the same shadows yet as those into which our Saviour crept. And that cup is never empty, though human lips are ever draining it to its dregs. It is close to my lips to-night—and to your sweet lips too, my darling—and we must drink it together.'

"'Together, Angus,' I said, 'thank God for that.' The word was sweet. Oh, father, head-winds are precious unto love if only love's hands together hold the sail.

"After a long silence Angus spoke again and my poor heart had to listen.

"'Margaret,' he began, 'no man ever renounced what I renounce to-night, for no man ever loved as I love you, though I reckon many a man would swear the same, knowing not his perjury—for none can know my love. And joy, and pride, and home—and all with which our pure thought had enriched our home—all these must I surrender now. I must give up everything but love—and that is mine forever. Oh, Margaret, I won you, did I not? I, a poor Scottish laddie, a herd among the heather. I came to Canada lang syne, and by and by I won you, did I not, Margaret?

"'But I must give you up—and I will tell you why.

"'It was not hard for me to find that story of Gethsemane. When I was but a laddie among the Scottish hills my mother's Bible aye opened at that very place; and laddie though I was, I noticed it, for the page was marked and worn and soiled with tears.

"'I asked my mother many a time why the Book

aye opened there and what soiled and marked it so. She told me not for long, saying only that it was marked and soiled before her laddie had been born.

"'But the night before I sailed from Annan Foot, she put her arms about me and she told me of the anguish of her soul and all about the tear-stained place—for she told me of her own Gethsemane and of the bitter cup, and said that her laddie's lips could pass it by no more than hers.

"'And ever since that night ma ain buik aye opens at Gethsemane. Oh, Margaret, you understand, do you not?' he cried, 'I am not worthy of you and of your love.

"'The far-off strain of sin starting from another heart than mine (another than my mother's, by the living God) has stained my name. Mine is an unhallowed name. Mine is a shadowed birth. Mine is the perpetual Gethsemane and mine the unemptied cup!

"'Forgive me, Margaret, for the wrong I did you. I should never have spoken love to you at all, or if I did, I should have told you of the blight upon it; but the sky and the trees and the hill were clothed that night in the beauty that wrapt my soul and I thought that God had forgotten and had shrived me in the same sacred light. But He does not forget. That light itself cannot drive the shadow from Geth-

semane and the cup has never since been absent from my lips.'

"Angus stopped—and God watched over me; for He pitied me.

"I thought of you and mother first, but God still kept my will in His. I wanted God to lead me and I asked Him to help me—and I waited.

"'Angus,' I said at last, 'your mother loved him, did she not?'

"'Loved!' he answered, 'her pure heart knew no other passion. My own is but an echo. Behold! I was shapen in love.'

"'Then,' said I, 'let her that is without love cast the first stone at her. If any sinning woman love, she has an advocate with the Father. Oh, Angus! Come to me!' I cried, for I was fainting."

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Her story was finished now and my daughter added not a word. But she arose and stood before me, her eyes searching my pallid face for a verdict, if haply it might be like her own. I noticed the woman's tactics in her move, for woman's genius makes its home within her soul; she had left my arms that I might, if I would, hold them out to her again and take her back forever. But the arms have their hinges in the heart and mine was tight locked like a vise.

"Margaret," I said at last, and my voice was like the voice of age, "you do not mean that you suffered this man's caresses after he told you what you have just told me?"

Sorrow looked from Margaret's eyes.

"Suffered!" she replied, "suffered! I have learned what suffering is, God knows, but He knows it was not there I learned it. 'This man.' Oh, father, I love him—am I all alone?"

How strong is the weakness of love! There is no panoply like that which love provides, and she who bears it has the whole armour of God.

"Margaret," I pleaded, "you surely will not ruin your life and break your mother's heart and mine by any madness such as this."

"'Ruin my life,' father! what ruin can there be to the life that loves and is loved? I have no life at all apart from him. It seems so simple. I can't take back my heart!"

"Perhaps so, my daughter," I replied, "perhaps so. I know your love is no fickle thing. But Margaret, you do not propose to link your life with his, shadowed as you yourself declare it to have been from his birth?"

"Father, it is already linked. It was not I who linked our lives, nor was it he; nor was it both together—it was God. Surely He wouldn't have let

me love and trust, if it was wrong. I want you to help me; I am all alone."

"But you do not mean," I cried with growing warmth, "that I, the minister of St. Cuthbert's Kirk, New Jedboro, am to be called upon to take into my family and to acknowledge as my son, a man who cannot speak his father's name, who cannot," for I was maddening fast, "speak it even to himself, forsooth, because he knows not what it is?"

"Oh, father, do not press me so; I love you—and I love him too, and——"

"But about our family?" I asked hotly.

"I forgot about families," she sobbed. "Oh, father, teach this poor heart of mine to love no more and I will obey your every wish—but it is hard for love to serve two masters."

My heart was wrung by her plaintive voice; but love dwells hard by cruelty, and my self-control was going fast. Let those defend me who have known my agony.

"You know, I suppose, the result that will issue from your madness? You know what it will mean to your future relations here?" I asked hoarsely, explaining my threat by a glance about the room.

"Don't call it madness, father," she replied, pleadingly. "There is no madness in love. I cannot help it, father. Why should I? Surely Angus is the

same as he was when first I loved him. I haven't learned anything new about the soul of him, father."

"But his origin?" I interrupted.

"But he is good, father,—and kind—and true—and he loves me."

It was but a moment till I was past the bounds of reason. Disappointment, pride, shame, anger—all these had their cruel way with me. I am covered with confusion as with a garment while I try to record what followed, though I could not tell it all, even if I would. There is no cruelty like the cruelty of love. For the anguished soul pours out the vials of its remorse and self-reproach upon the well loved head, and fury waxes with its shame.

"I want none of your preaching," and my voice was coarse with anger; "you are a willful and disobedient child and you may as well learn first as last who is the master of this house. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear,—and my heart is broken. You want me to go away and not to see me any more. And I don't know where to go."

She was kneeling now and the tears were dropping hot upon my hand, which she had taken in both of hers. "Oh, father, when birdlings leave the nest, surely God wants them to go, because He gives them wings. Father, dear, oh, do not push me out in this

cruel way. I want to keep you and Angus both—and mother. Am I really wrong?

"Father, you are a preacher of the Everlasting Gospel, and doesn't that say we were all born wrong and need to be born again? You said only last Sunday that if we're once on the Rock, God forgets all about the pit and the miry clay. And you said God makes the past new—all new, and that all the redeemed ones are just the same in His sight—all good, and with the past away behind them. I thought it was beautiful, because I thought about Angus—and it seemed just like the Saviour's way."

My heart was wrung with a great desire to take the bended form unto myself. I half moved forward to kiss the lips of this kneeling priestess unto love. But as I did so the memory of other lips that had been pressed to them rolled in upon me and swept away the better impulse. I faltered into compromise.

"Margaret, you are still my daughter and I am touched by what you say. Let us find common ground. Promise me that you will suspend judgment in this matter for a year, your promise meantime to be revoked and at the end of that time, we will take it up afresh. This will give time for sober judgment."

But her blanched face turned to mine, and the

white lips spoke again. "Oh, spare me, father, for I cannot—you know I cannot—oh, father, pity me!"

My soul flamed with ungovernable anger. I did pity her and this it was that stirred my cruelty. For my soul relapsed to barbarous coarseness and I said: "Then choose between us—you can have your ——," and I called him an awful word, the foulest of all words, whose very sound speaks the shame it means to tell, the curse of humanity hissed in its nauseous syllables.

And more—but how can I write it down! I did not strike her—but I thrust her from me; I laid my coward hand upon her shoulder—not in violence nor heavily, but eternal menace was in it. For I pushed her from me, crying brutally: "Quote me another Scripture. Have you not chosen the better part? There is the door which his shadow first accursed—you see the door?" and I hurled the poisoned word at her again.

She looked at me but once—as one, suddenly awakening, looks at her assassin. Then she went out, a lover as white as snow.

XXI

The OLD PRECENTOR'S NEW SONG

AS a stream emerges from its forest tunnel, eluding the embrace of tangled shadows, swiftly gliding from sombre swamps and hurrying towards the sunlit plain, its phantom weeds of widowhood exchanged for its bridal robe of light; so doth this tale of mine glide forth from the sable shadows which garrison the chapter it has left behind.

No man loves to linger by his scaffold, though it be cheated of its last adornment, and though no eye behold its grinning outline but its own. For there are shadowy scaffolds, and invisible executioners, sitting at our own boards and eating of our own bread, discernible only in a glass. Our own Sheriffs and Executioners are we all.

Swift in the wake of sorrow came the unromantic form of toil. Thank God! Work is sorrow's cure, its hands like the hands of an enemy, but its voice the voice of an Eternal friend. For duty is God's midwife, sent to deliver the soul that travails in its anguish.

It was but the day after Margaret had passed from out my door, girding it as she went with crape, invisible to other eyes, that I was called to Archie McCormack's house. The day was bright and clear, but I knew it not—for in this doth sorrow make us like to God, that then the darkness and the light are both alike.

For some months past, my old precentor had been failing fast. The doctor said it was his heart, but none of us believed it; for his heart had grown larger, stronger, happier with every passing year. Its outer life might perish if it would, but its inner life was renewed day by day. Indeed, his soul's second harvest seemed to take the form of cheerfulness, the scantiest crop of all in the stern seasons of his earlier life. Even merriment sought to bloom before the frost should come.

The very day before Margaret and I began our life's Lenten season, I had been to see him, little thinking that my next visit was to be the last. My own heart was full of that joy whose overflow Margaret had entrusted to its care—which is a great gift to a minister, this gift of gladness, seeking as he does to irrigate the thirsty plains of life about him.

"How is my precentor to-day?" I asked as I sat down at the blazing hearth. He was lying on the couch, the fourth gradation—the field, the veranda,

the room, the couch, the bed, the grave—thus the promotion runs!

"I'm by or'nar glad to see ye," he replied, evasively. "The auld freens are the best."

"That's good, Archie, the old friends are glad to hear it. They hear it seldom from Scottish lips, however hopefully they suspect it."

"We're nae muckle given to compliments—I'll grant ye that. But whiles we think; an' whiles we speak—an' whiles we wunna. But I'm no backward in tellin' a man gin I care for him. Noo, I was sayin' to the wife this verra day that yon man ye brocht frae Montreal last simmer was like eneuch a graun preacher—I'm no disputin' that, mind ye. But I was sayin' to the wife as hoo I likit yirsel' fully mair nor him."

I smiled with pleasure, for the process was an interesting one. Bouquets look strange in these rough Scottish hands—but their fragrance is the sweeter for all that.

"I understand, Archie. You do not often pay a compliment, but I know its sincerity when it comes and I appreciate it all the same."

He had not finished, for he felt he had gone too far.

"Aye, that's what I was sayin' to the wife. I likit yirsel' fully better nor him—it's different ye see; I'm gettin' kind o' used to ye, ye ken!"

This made his tribute morally complete. Oh, thou Scotchman! Thou canst not withhold a tincture of lemon from the sweetest cup!

"But how is my precentor to-day?" I renewed, fearful of additional repairs to his eulogy.

"Weel, I'm no' complainin'—an' I'm no' boastin'; but there's mony a yin waur. I'm no' sufferin' pain to speak o'. I can sleep at nicht, an' I tak my parritch, an' I hae ma faculties—an' I'm in God's hauns," he said, the climax coming with unconscious power.

"There's no better bulletin than that," I responded. "I see you still take your smoke, Archie," I added cheerfully, nodding towards an ancient trusty pipe which enjoyed its brief respite on a chair, long his familiar friend, and noticeably breathing out its loyalty where it lay.

"Ou, aye, I dinna lack for ony o' the needcessities o' life, thank God," he replied gratefully, and with utter seriousness.

"What a blessing that you are free from pain," I hurriedly remarked; for the mouth, like a capricious steed, is more easily controlled when it is in motion.

"Aye, that's a great blessin'. I've been uncommon free frae pain. A fortnight syne, I had a verra worritsome feelin' in ma innerts—a kind o' colic, I'm jalousin'. Sandy Grant said as how whusky wi' a little sulphur was gey guid. I tell 't him I never

had nowt to dae wi' sulphur i' ma life, an' I wudna begin to bother wi't noo;" and Archie lifted his eyebrows, adjusted his night-cap, and turned upon me a very solemn smile.

He doubtless saw by my face that I approved his caution, for I secretly believed that he was right. Thus confirmed, he lay meditating for a time, but it was soon made evident that his thoughts had not wandered far from the matter in hand.

"Aye, sulphur's nae improvement to whusky," he slowly averred at length, "forbye, I was richt. I was richt frae a medeecinal standpoint, ye ken. The verra next day ma doctor ordered me to tak a little whusky for the pain I tell't ye o'. An' I did; I took it afore he tell't me."

"And it did you good, Archie?" I asked indulgently.

"Guid?" replied Archie, in a tone of much reproach. Then he said no more, scorning to demonstrate an axiom. But he was not through with the subject. The moral had still to be pointed.

"Is't no won'erfu', minister, the law o' compensation that oor Creator gies us, to reach a' through oor lives?

"Pain has its ither side, ye ken. An' when we say as hoo it's an ill wind that blaws naebody guid, we're acknowledgin' the love o' the Almichty. Ilka

cloud has aye its siller linin'. Noo, for instance, it was a fearfu' pain I took—but the ither that I took to cure it—it was Scotch," and Archie drew a gentle sigh, half of piety and half of reminiscence.

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When next I turned my steps towards Archie's door, though only two short days had fled, all life had changed to me and darkness hung about me like a pall. Upon which change I was bitterly reflecting when I was interrupted by a message that Archie was taken somewhat worse and not expected to live longer than through the night. And I could not but be glad of this summons from my own life's tragedy, that I might share another's. It is God's blessed way. The balm for secret sorrow is in the bosom of another burden, unselfishly assumed; and the Cyrenian of every age hath this for his hire, that, while he bends beneath another's cross, he is disburdened of his own.

I found my old precentor weak, and failing fast, but "verra composed," as we say in New Jedboro.

He welcomed me with a gentle smile.

"Ye'll pray wi' me," he said gravely, "but it'll no' be the closin' prayer. I'm wearin' awa fast, but I'll no' leave ye till the morn, I'm dootin'. Pit up a bit prayer noo—but there's ae thing—dinna mind the

Maister o' His promise to come again an' receive me till Himsel'—no' that it isna a gowden word; but I want it keepit till the last an' it's the last word I want to hear. Speak it to me when I hear the surge. That'll gie Him time eneuch, for He'll no' be far awa. An' I want to hear it aboon the billows. Noo pit up yir prayer."

Short and simple were our petitions; for the prayer of little children is best for those who are about to enter into the kingdom of God.

After we had finished, my eyes, unknown to him, were long fixed on Archie's face. For a strange interest centres about those whose loins are girded for long journeys; and I have never outgrown the boyish awe with which I witnessed the loosening of the ropes that held aerial travellers to the earth. I have seen some scores of persons die,

> "By many a death-bed I have been
> And many a sinner's parting seen,"

but the awful tragedy is ever new and familiarity breeds increasing reverence. Death is a hero to his valet.

"You are not afraid, Archie?" I said at length—the old question that springs, not to the dying, but to the living lips.

"Afeart!" said Archie, "what wad I be afeart for?"

"You are not afraid to meet your Lord?" I answered, inwardly reproaching myself for the words.

"Afeart!" repeated the dying man, "afeart to meet ma Lord. Why should I be feart to meet a Man that died for me?"

I inwardly blessed him for the great reply and engaged its unanswerable argument for my next Sabbath's sermon. No man dieth unto himself.

"Wull ye dae something for me?" said Archie, suddenly. "Wull ye write to a man I kent lang syne?"

"Certainly," said I. "Who is the man, Archie?"

"I'll tell ye, gin ma hairt hauds guid a meenit. It's Andra Mathieson—an' he lives in San Francisco. Him an' me gaed to the schule thegither in the Auld Country, an' I hadna seen him for nigh fifty year till last Can'lemas a twalmonth, when I gaed to San Francisco for ma health. He's awfu' rich. He lives in a graun hoose an' he has a coachman wi' yin o' thae coats wi' buttons. But I gaed to see him an' I needna hae been sae feart, for he minded on me, an' he wadna hear o' me bidin' at the taivern, an' he took me to his graun hoose, an' he was ower guid to a plain cratur like me.

"Weel, ae mornin', we was sittin', haein' oor crack aboot the auld days, an' the schule, an' the sheep we herded thegither on the Ettrick hills. But oor crack

aye harkit back to the kirk an' the minister an' the catechism, an' a' thae deeper things o' auld lang syne. He said as hoo he had gane far bye thae things, livin' amang the stour o' a' his siller—but he remarkit that he aften thocht o' the auld ways, an' the auld tunes, an' the minister wi' his goon an' bands; an' he said he was fair starvin' for a psalm—or a paraphrase. They dinna sing them in Ameriky. An' I lilted yin till him—we was lookin' far oot at the Gowden Gate, an' it lookit like the crystal water ma een'll sune see."

Archie stopped, though apparently but little exhausted. His eyes seemed flooded with tender memories of that momentous hour on the far distant Pacific Coast.

"What psalm did you sing him?" I ventured, presently.

"It was a paraphrase," he answered, the smile still upon his face. "It was the twenty-sixth:

"'Ho ye that thirst approach the spring
Where living waters flow,'

an' Andra grat like a bairn:

"'I haena heard it sin I ran barefit aboot the hills,' he said, an' he wad hae me sing the lines ower again:

"'How long to streams of false delight
Will ye in crowds repair?'

an' I'm no' worthy, I ken, but I pit up a bit prayer wi' him—ye mauna think I'm boastin', sir, but I brocht him to Christ, an' when I think on't noo, it's lichtsome, an' I'm minded o' that simmer sun on the Gowden Gate. Ye'll write to him an' tell him we'll sing a psalm thegither yet."

My promise given and Andrew Mathieson's address taken, Archie lay silent for a little time. Swift glances at myself, swiftly withdrawn, denoted his desire to say something more. It came at length and with unmistakable directness.

"I'm dootin' I've been wrang; mebbe I was 'righteous over-much.'"

"What is it, Archie?" I said soothingly. "Some sin? Or some mistake in the days that are gone?"

"I'm no' sayin' it was the yin or the ither," replied the old precentor, a familiar frosty flavour in his voice, "an' if it was, I'll no' confess it to ony yin but God—but I'm misdootin' I was ower hard on the hymes."

"What hymns, Archie?" I asked, seeking only to make easier his acknowledgment of error, ever difficult to Scottish lips. For, if the truth were told, Scotchmen secretly divide sins into three classes, those of omission, of commission, and of admission.

"Ye ken fine," he made reply, "div ye no' mind hoo Margaret an' Angus Strachan compeared afore

the Kirk Session wi' their prayer for man-made hymes i' the kirk?"

"Yes, Archie, I remember—the Session denied their request."

Ah me, I thought, how much has befallen Margaret and Margaret's father since that night!

"Ay, I ken that; an' I'm no' regrettin'—but I'm dootin' I was ower hard on the hymes. My speerit was aye ower fiery for an elder. But King Dauvit himsel' was mair fearsome than me wi' blasphemers —no' to ca' Margaret yin; but I'm mindin' that the Maister aye took anither way, a better yin, I'm dootin'. An' I'm feart I was mair like Dauvit, for a' I'd raither be like the Maister."

"You have the right of it, Archie; He showed us the more excellent way."

"Forbye," Archie went on, pursuing his line of thought, "I've my misgivin's aboot wha wrote thae hymes. It wasna the deevil, an' it wasna Watts, an' it wasna yon great Methody body; they set them doon, nae doot—but wha started them? I'm sair dootin' they had their rise amang the hills, the same whaur Dauvit saw the glory o' God."

"Above the hills of time," I added softly.

"An' what's mair, it kind o' came to me that a hyme micht be a prayer, ye ken. Noo, your prayer in the kirk is no' inspired. That is, no' like Dauvit's

psalms—but it's upliftin' for a' that. An' I'm thinkin' that mebbe it's nae waur to lilt a prayer than to speak yin, an' mebbe the great Methody was prayin' when he said:

"'Let me to Thy bosom fly,'

an' I'm dootin' we micht dae waur than jine wi' him."

"There is no more fitting prayer for such an hour as this," I responded, thinking it meet to incline his thoughts towards the encircling glow with which the last great morning was already illumining his face.

But Archie still pursued his line of thought. No such great concession as this was to be left undefined; this codicil to his whole life's will and testament must be explained.

"I ken the hymes never had what I micht ca' a fair chance wi' me. My faither cudna thole them, an' he cudna bide ony ither body to thole them. He aye said the heather wasna dry yet wi' the Covenanters' bluid. Ma ain girlie, wee Kirsty,—she likit them fine, but I forbade her. This was the way it cam aboot—div ye mind the year o' the Exposeetion in Paris? Weel, me an' Kirsty's mither took a jaunt an' gaed till't. We was ower three weeks amang thae foreign fowk, wi' nae parritch an' nae psalm. We gaed frae Paris to the auld hame in Ettrick, an' 'twas like gae'n to Abraham's bosom frae the ither place. Weel, the first Sabbath day, we gaed to the

auld Scotch kirk, and we were starvin' for the bread o' life.

"Naethin' had we had but the bit sweeties o' the English kirk near by, wi' their confections—an' ance we gaed to the Catholic, but it was a holiday. Weel, as I was sayin', we gaed to the Ettrick kirk an' the minister came into the pulpit wi' his goon an' bands —fair graun it was.

"'Let us worship God,' he said, an' 'twas like the click o' the gate at hame. Then he gied oot a psalm:

> "'So they from strength unwearied go
> Still forward unto strength.'

"The precentor was naethin' graun. I have heard better in St. Cuthbert's. He was oot mebbe a quarter o' a beat in his time, but the auld words had their power; 'twas like as if I heard my mither's voice again, an' I cudna sing for greetin', but my hairt aye keepit time, an' I resolved then no' to let Kirsty sing the hymes ony mair—but I'm misdootin' I've been wrang."

Backward rolled the night and onward rolled the day as we kept our vigil by the dying bed. Ever solemn hour, rehearsal of a darker yet to be! For that same mystery shall wrap every watcher's heart, and others then shall stand by the fallen sentinels.

Archie slumbered and waked by turns. We were

just beginning to feel the approach of the magnetic dawn when he awoke from an hour's sleep.

"The nicht's near gane," he said, "an' I'll sleep nae mair; for I aye likit to greet the mornin' licht."

We gathered closer, the old childish instinct which drove us to the wharf's very edge when the sails were being hoisted and the anchor weighed.

He beckoned me closer and I bent to catch his words.

"Ye micht gie thae thochts o' mine to the Session gin the maitter comes up again—aboot the hymes, ye ken, aboot hoo they micht be made intil a prayer."

I silently gave the promise.

"An' mair—I dinna forbid ye to sing a bit hyme at the funeral. Let Wullie Allison lift the tune, for he aye keeps the time. Yon Methody's hyme wad dae:

> "'Hide me, oh, my Saviour hide
> Till the storm of life is past,'

for the wind'll be doon then, I'm hopin'.

"The fowk'll think it strange, for they a' ken my convictions, sae ye'd better close wi' a paraphrase:

> "'Then will He own His servant's name
> Before His father's face.'

That wad dae fine, for it's a' o' grace thegither."

Archie lay silent for a time, breathing heavily, the tumult of the last great conflict blending every moment with the peace of the last great surrender. An instant later, the dying face seemed lightened, like one who descries the lights of home.

"I canna juist mind the words; is it the outgoin' o' the mornin' He makes to rejoice?"

"And the evening," I said quickly, "the evening too, Archie."

"Aye," he answered peacefully, "I thocht He wadna forget the gloamin'. Aye, mair the evenin' than the mornin', I'm thinkin'."

His face was radiant now, for the morning light had passed us watchers by, its glory resting on the face that loved to greet it.

"Haud ma haun, guid-wife," his voice upborne by the buoyancy of death. "I'm slippin' fast into the licht. I see what they ca' the gates o' deith. The licht has found them oot. They've been sair maligned, I'm thinkin'. The pulpit has misca'd them, but the believer's deein' lips can ca' them fair. They're the gates o' deith, nae doot, but the Maister hauds the keys."

We stood as close to the old precentor as we might, but we were in the shadow still. For death seldom shares his surprises with the alien and is selfish with his secret luxuries.

"Hark ye!" the dying man suddenly cried. "Div ye no' hear the sang? It's graun ayont the thocht o' man. They're a' in white, an' it's 'Martyrdom' is the tune. Wha's leadin' them? I see Him fine; it's Him wha made the sang itsel'. It's Him wha's leadin' them. Div ye no' ken what they're singin'? It's the new sang, the sang o' Moses an' the Lamb. An' hark ye! it's the same as the psalm my mither taught me. I canna tell the yin frae the ither."

And the old precentor hurried on to join the choir invisible.

XXII

"The MILLS of The GODS"

MARGARET was home again. She had been gone from us two immeasurable days. It was Mr. Blake who rang the bell, for it was his house had sheltered her when my cruel anger drove her from my own. Need and sorrow never turned to him in vain.

When the door was opened, Margaret stood before it alone. Her mother it was who opened unto her, for this is woman's oldest and holiest avocation, doorkeeper unto wandering feet. In all His delicate missions woman is God's deputy.

Through all my narrative of this sad affair I have said but little of Margaret's mother, but I know my readers have discerned her presence amid it all, as one discerns a brooding mountain through the mist. The great background of every tragedy is a woman's stately sorrow.

I had been visiting the sick, far more for my sake than for theirs, and was not home when Margaret returned. But a nameless fragrance greeted me at the door, and in my study I found Margaret in her mother's arms. The latter quietly withdrew and the

compact between father and daughter was soon complete. It was of mutual surrender, wherein is mutual peace. Margaret's only word was that she could not give her father up—nor Angus—that I must say nothing more about her love and that we must wait —together. Which was all sweet enough to me, for she was mine again, and our manse light had been rekindled.

For the rest, I was willing to wait, on which after all hangs the reality of all joy or sorrow. Every grief hath that opportunity of cure; every joy that peril of vicissitude. Till time hath ceased from her travail, no man can tell her offspring's sex, whether it be rugged care, or sweet and tender joy.

Meantime, Margaret nestled again within the old tender place and we both struggled to nourish our phantom joy. Counterfeit though we both discerned it, yet it passed unchallenged between us and at least kept our souls' commerce from decay. Counterfeit I have called it, for the tenure of another's love was upon her; and her stay with us was like that of a sailor lad who is for a time ashore, waiting for the tardy tide.

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The ordination Sabbath was aglow with holy light. God surely loves Presbyterian high days, for they are nearly always beautiful. St. Cuthbert's was filled

long before eleven with a reverent and expectant congregation. Five new elders had been elected, three of them their father's successors, for this was a common custom in New Jedboro, and apostolic succession in disguise was in high favour amongst us. Another was a man of seventy or more, for every ordination must recognize the stalwarts whose days of activity were past but whose time for honour was at hand. The remaining elder-elect was Angus Strachan. His choice by the congregation had been unanimous and cordial. His examination by the Session had resulted in hearty confirmation. Our manse tragedy was unknown to any of the elders except Mr. Blake, who preserved complete silence throughout the interview. The ordeal was painful beyond words to me —but it was over, and Angus sat in the front pew with the other four, awaiting ordination to their sacred office.

We had sung the psalm which from time immemorial Presbyterian ministers have announced on all ecclesiastical occasions, the hundred and second psalm, the second version, from the thirteenth verse, reading over again, as their habit is, the first two lines :

> "Thou shalt arise and mercy yet
> Thou to Mount Zion shalt extend;"

the venerable Dr. Inglis of Moffat had preached the sermon from the text:—"Feed the flock of God

which is among you," and the elders elect took their places before the pulpit.

I addressed them in what I considered fitting terms, recalling the great traditions of the church they were called to serve and the noble labours of the godly men whose mantles had now fallen upon themselves. I referred to our precious legacy, bequeathed to us from the hands of Covenanters, and a reverent hush throughout the whole congregation applauded the names of Renwick and Peden and Cameron, as they fell from my lips.

Then all the elders took their places beside me, for the act of ordination was about to be performed. This consisted of prayer and the laying on of hands —not of the minister's hands alone, for we in St. Cuthbert's adhered to the ancient Scottish mode of ordination by the laying on of the hands of the entire Session.

The candidates kneeled before us, Angus on my right, having changed his place for some unapparent reason, soon to be abundantly revealed. The hands first outstretched towards his bended head were those of Mr. Blake. Whereupon an awful thing befell us; for the solemn stillness of the kirk was broken by the ringing of a voice aflame with passion:—"Take back your hand—touch not a hair of my head. Go cleanse your hand. Go purify your heart—they are

both polluted. Whited sepulchre, give up your dead—let the rotting memories walk forth. Go wash another's blood from your guilty soul before you dare to serve at God's altar!"

The trembling object of this outburst shrank back from before it. The kneeling candidates bowed lower. I myself stood as one in a fearful dream, while the horror-stricken people half rose within their pews, bending forward as they gazed at the sacrilegious scene.

Angus turned and looked unflinchingly into their faces. I feared he was about to speak again and I raised my hand to signify forbiddal—but he saw it not, and my inward protest yielded to his fiery purpose.

"Aye, you may well look," he cried to the awe-struck worshippers. "God knows I had not meant to do this thing or to speak these words. I came here with the honest purpose to assume the vows that should forever bind me to His service. My heart was honest before God; but when I felt the approach of those guilty hands it was beyond my power to endure their touch. Nor should I feel shame for what I have done. You remember the scourge of knotted cords and the holy temple. Is it wrong that I too should now seek to drive forth this unworthy man? He stands unmasked before you. You know not who he is! He is my father and we share our shame together!

Another shares it with her God where the Ettrick water hears her prayer. And this is the man whose hands would convey the grace of God!"

He stopped; and the blanched faces before him gave back a voice, half cry, half sob, anguish rending every heart. They were a proud folk in St. Cuthbert's; besides no man of all the elders was so dear to them as Mr. Blake, his piety and philanthropy so long tried and proved. Although we know it not, there is no asset held more dear than the solvency of a man in whom we vest the precious savings of our confidence.

Every eye and heart seemed turned towards the man so fiercely accused, silently entreating him to relieve the cruel tension.

None doubted that his swift denial would confirm the confidence of our loyal hearts. But the silence drew itself out, moment after moment, each bequeathing its legacy of pain to its successor. Mr. Blake's eyes were raptly fixed on his accuser—his traducer, as we secretly defined him. Their light was not the glow of wrath, nor of resentment, but of a strange wistful curiosity, mixed with eager yearning. Fear and love seemed to look out together.

In the pause that followed, Angus swiftly handed to me a small picture, encased after an ancient fashion.

"Look at that, sir," he said, "that will tell its tale —that is my father's face."

I looked with eager intentness, and it required but a glance to show that the pictured face before me, and the pallid face beside me, were the same. The picture was evidently taken long years before, and the stamp of youth and hope and ardent faith was upon the face. Locks raven black, and an unwrinkled brow, had been exchanged for those that bore the scar of time and care; but no careful eye could fail to see that the youthful face of the picture and the ashen face of the elder were one and the same.

But,—more striking and fatal far—the photograph's evidence was not required. No man who saw, as I saw, the faces of Michael Blake and Angus Strachan side by side need wait for other evidence. Often had I seen them thus before—but never in the nakedness of passion.

Passion has the artist's magic hand and her master sketch is ever of her home. As Titian's immortal hills were but the reproduction of his far-off dwelling-place, genius plighting its troth to childhood, so doth passion illumine first the environs of her long time home, how humble so ever it may be. Passion paints the eternal childlike that is in us all. The face is the window through which the vista of a

soul's inner life is flashed by her mystic hand, and in that moment the window glows with the unfeigned light of childhood, its simple radiance still unquenched, though long draped by artificial years.

Thus transfigured were the faces of Angus Strachan and Michael Blake—the one with mingled love and fear, the other with unmingled scorn. With that swift intensity of passion came the reversal to their common type, and the great betrayal was complete. The blood they shared together, speaking a kindred language, had turned King's evidence at last, and its unanswerable testimony leaped from face and eye.

For God hath His silent witnesses, like John the Baptist, by us shut up in prison and by us beheaded —but He calleth them to the witness-stand as pleaseth Him; and they live forever in dreadful gospels of love and doom, the latter sharing the power of the former's endless life. Their voice is heard above Herodias' strains of revelry and even sceptred Sadducees tremble at the sound.

Vast is life's mighty forest, but the wronger and the wronged meet somewhere amid its shadowy glades. Surely life's wooded maze might afford a hiding place to those who fly from armed memories —but God's rangers tread its every glen with stealthy step and the foliage of every thicket gleams with the

armour of His detective host. A chance meeting, a foundling acquaintance, a stray newspaper, an undestroyed letter, a resurgent memory, a neglected photograph, or, as here, a tell-tale tide of blood—all these have accepted God's retainer and bear the invisible badge that denotes His world-spread Force. All life's apparent discord is harmony itself when He determines the departments and allots to every thing, and to every man, his work!

"You speak of Ettrick! What know you of Ettrick? What is her name that lives there?" I heard Mr. Blake ask in a faltering whisper, unheard by the rigid worshippers.

"She bears no name save that which you defiled —it shall not be spoken here, though I honour it with my deepest heart—but look on this," and Angus held out before him what he had drawn from his bosom as he spoke.

Michael Blake's gaze was fixed upon it, no word or sound coming from his lips. His eyes clung to it with tranquil eagerness, unconscious of all about, still clinging when Angus withdrew it, wrapped it in the paper which had enclosed it, and restored it to its hiding-place.

I know not why, but I held out my hand to him eagerly:

"Let me see it, Angus; my own mother is with God."

He hesitated but a moment, then drew it forth and handed it to me.

"All the world may see it," he said quietly, "it is my mother—you may read the letter if you will."

The portrait was of a woman still rich with girlhood's charm. Of about nineteen years, I should say, tall and graceful and sweet of countenance, with a great wealth of hair, with eyes that no flame but love's could have kindled, her lips, even in a picture, instinct with pure passion, and her whole being evidently fragrant and luscious as Scottish girlhood alone can be. For the sweetest flowers are nourished at the breast of the most rugged hills.

I was still reading the story of love and innocence and hope, all of which were written in the lovely face before me, when Angus said very gently:

"Read the letter, sir."

The writing on the paper which enclosed the picture had escaped my notice. It was a letter from Angus' mother, sent with the daguerreotypes. Its closing words ran thus:

"I send ye this picture o' masel' and the ane o' the man I loved sae weel. No ither picture have I had taken, nor ither shall there be. It was taken for yir faither before the gloamin' settled doon on you and me, ma laddie. It was taken for him, as was every breath I drew, for I loved him wi' every ane.

"Ye maunna think ower hard o' him, laddie, for yir mother canna drive him forth, so ye maun bide thegither in this broken hairt o' mine. And laddie, I am askin' God to keep me pure, for my love will hae its bloom some day far ayont us, like the bonny heather when the winter's bye. And I want to be worthy when it comes. I'm sair soiled, I ken, but love can weave its robe o' white for the very hairt it stained. And I maun be true till the gloamin's gone. So think o' yir mother as aye true to yir faither, and it'll mebbe help yir sorrow to ken there's aye this bond between yir faither and her wha bore ye. And Angus, dinna let him ken, gin ye should ever meet. Yir mother's bearin' her sorrow all alane in Ettrick and her laddie'll bear it ayont the ocean. We're a' in God's guid hands. Your loving mother,

JANET STRACHAN."

I returned the well worn letter to the unhappy hand from which I had received it. He tenderly wrapped it about his mother's picture and thrust the parcel back beside the loyal heart which shared, as it was bidden, the great sorrow and disgrace.

I then cast about in my mind for the next step which should be taken. Ordination I knew there could now be none. The pestilence of anger and shame and sin was upon us all. Dark horror sat upon the faces

of the waiting congregation, their eyes still fixed on these two actors of this so sudden tragedy. It may have been that the proof of kinship, as demonstrated by these confronting faces, was finding its way into their hearts. These faces were still fastened the one upon the other, the younger with glowing scorn, the older with mingled love and tenderness, blended with infinite self-reproach.

I could see no course open to me except the dismissal of the congregation, and so announced my purpose.

"The Kirk Session is adjourned sine die," I said, for this is an ancient phrase and the proper forms must be observed. Even when our dearest lies in her coffin, there are certain phrases which announce in cold and heartless print that the heart's life-blood is flowing from its wound, and, however sacred that silent form, the undertaker's hands must have their will with it.

"Moderator." It was Thomas Laidlaw's voice. "Moderator, we hae heard but ae side. There's aye twa sides. Will ye no' let the accused speak for himsel'? Fair play is bonny play."

A moment's thought was enough to assure me as to what was right.

"By all means," I answered, sadly enough, for I had but little hope that any defense could be offered.

"Mr. Blake may certainly speak if he wishes—it is but fair. Have you anything to say, Mr. Blake?"

As I turned towards the older man the younger withdrew his eyes from the face on which they had so long been fixed, and slowly rising, Angus walked down the aisle towards the door, conscious that he himself had proclaimed his bitter shame; but his mother's name seemed written on his forehead, redeemed by the sacrifice of his own. He had gone but a quarter of the way or so, when a trembling voice was heard.

"Angus, wait," it said; the voice was faint and tremulous like a birdling's note—but Angus heard it and stood still. He turned towards the pew whence it came, and a face met his own, a woman's face, blanched and pale, except for two burning spots upon her cheeks where the heart had unfurled its banners. It was a woman's voice, I say, and the eyes that looked out from it sought his own with a great caress of loyalty and love. The glowing eyes, and the parted lips, and the quick flowing breath, all spoke the bridal passion; for the bride's glory is in surrender, the bodily sacrifice but the pledge of her blended and surrendered life, lost in another's mastering love.

"Angus, wait," she murmured again, her dainty gloved hand upon the book-board as she essayed to rise. Her mother sought to restrain her, but her

touch was powerless; for the outgoing tide was at its full.

"He shall not walk down that aisle alone," she faltered to her mother, the words unheard by others. "We shall go down together."

XXIII

A MAIDEN PRIESTESS

PERHAPS her mother's woman-heart realized in that moment that the one path irresistible to a woman's love is the path of sacrifice. In any case she ceased from her protest and the gentle form arose; moving out to where he stood, she slipped her dear hand into Angus's, and together they walked slowly down the aisle of the crowded church. No sideward glance they cast nor backward did Margaret ever look. Sweet courage was shining from her face, even joy, as they passed out together —the long stride of the stalwart man and the gentle step of the dainty maiden, but ever hand in hand, hidden from the strife of tongues, in love's pavilion hidden.

They had wandered, knowing not where or whither, some distance from the church, when Angus stopped, and fixing his reverent look on Margaret's strangely happy face, he said:

"You don't know what you have done; you have tarnished your name—oh, Margaret, why did you do it? From henceforth you will share the shame that belongs to me."

Margaret's face was upturned to his own.

"Is not the sunshine sweet, Angus? And so pure! Surely God loves us well!"

"It shines upon no man so sad as I," he replied bitterly.

"Angus! After what I did—and the church so full!"

"Nor so happy—and so proud!" concluded Angus. "Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere," answered Margaret; "we shall walk the long walk together."

"No, dear one, not together, that cannot be—but not apart," said Angus, his voice trembling.

"Do you know, Angus," said Margaret after a pause, "I had often read about how engagements should be announced. And no one, almost no one knew that you loved me. And after that first time when you told me you loved me—and before you told me that other—I so often used to lie awake and think about how ours should be announced. For I think that is the sweetest thing in a girl's life, the announcement I mean—no I don't mean that—the sweetest thing is what has to be told. And now it is all told—and just to think it was done in a church and before all those people. And now they all know—and I am so glad! No girl ever had it done like this before."

"Glad?" said Angus.

"Yes, glad—and proud—aren't you?"

But there was no response, save the old, old silent eloquence of love, when lip speaks to lip its tender tale, scorning the aid of words.

"Let us go this way," said Margaret at length.

"Where does it lead to?"

"You shall see," she answered; "come away"—and together, still hand in hand, they walked on.

"Let us rest here, Angus." He threw himself on the grass at her feet.

"Do you not know the place?" she said.

"No," said Angus, "were we ever here before?"

"Oh, Angus, how could you forget? Look again."

He looked again and sacred twilight memories began to pour back upon him.

"That was in the gloaming, Angus, you remember. And the darkness has often brooded over it since then—but it is all past now and it never was so bright before."

"The darkness will come again," said Angus.

"But it will never be able to forget the light—and it will wait—— There is never any real brightness till the waiting's past."

The Sabbath stillness was about them and its peace was in their hearts. They scarce knew why, and the world would have said that Shadow was their por-

tion; but, then and ever, true peace passeth all understanding.

"Kneel down, Angus, kneel here beside me," she suddenly exclaimed.

"Kneel, Margaret! Why shall I kneel?"

"Never mind why—you shall see. Kneel down, Angus."

He knelt, wondering still; she removed his hat with her now ungloved hands and threw it on the grass.

"Darling, I love you," she said, "and I know you are good and true. And I was so proud this morning when you were to be ordained to God's holy service—and it must not be broken off like this. Oh, Angus, when I saw your face this morning, I feared so that your whole soul would turn to bitterness and give itself up to hatred of that man. But it must not be."

"Margaret, stop! Surely you must know ——"

"Be still, Angus—it must not be. All this anguish must break in blessing. Sorrow such as yours will be either a curse or a blessing—and it must not be a curse. God's love can turn it into blessing—and so can mine. We shall take up our cross together and shall see it blossom yet. Oh, Angus, if I can forgive him, you can, for you are dearer to me than to anybody else." Her hands were now upon his head:—"Angus Strachan, I ordain you to suffer

and to wait. I ordain you to God's service in the name of love and sorrow and God—and they're all the same name—and I love you so—and you are an elder now. Oh, dear Lord, take care of our love and make us true—and patient. And bless our sorrow and make it sweet and keep us near the Man of Sorrows. Amen."

The white dimpled hands rested long upon the auburn locks of the still bended head, and her compassion flowed through them to the more than orphaned heart. It was the same head, she thought, and the same heart, as had once been blessed by a mother's anguished hand, doomed, as that mother knew, to the world's unreasoning scorn.

Her own peace seemed to pass into his troubled soul; the anointed head bowed lower and the yoke was laid upon him, never to be withdrawn. But its bitterness was gone, purged from it by those white dimpled hands, and the fragance of a soul's sweeter life was there instead. For there had come to him that great moment when secret rebellion turns to secret prayer, craving blessing from the very hand that had smitten him with lameness; and Angus was making his ordination vows to God.

Upon that grassy knoll, under heaven's tender sky, with unmoving lips and broken heart he made the great surrender. Patience he promised God; and in

return he begged the forgiving heart, the strength to bear his lifelong load, and the aid which might enable him to attain that miracle of grace when he yet should pray for the man whose sin had foreclothed his life in shame.

"Let us go back," said Margaret, at length, for the sun was westering.

"Yes, we will go back," said he, for in the gentle words he heard the bugle call; "we will go back." But first he kissed the ordaining hands, anointed as they had been to cast out evil from the heart and to bind up its brokenness.

Homeward they turned their steps, and the noises of the uncaring world soon fell upon their ears, but their hearts were holden of another song, and they heard them not.

Backward they bent their way to the world and its cruel pity—but ever hand in hand.

* * * * * *

As the reader already knows, Margaret and Angus went forth from St. Cuthbert's Church just as Michael Blake was invited to speak in his own defense and to answer, if he might, the dread charge of his accuser.

"Have you anything to say, Mr. Blake?" were the words I had just uttered when Margaret and her

lover left the church, with all the sequel which hath been just recorded.

In answer, he watched the retreating forms till they had departed, then buried his face in his hands. He sat thus so long that I concluded he had no heart to speak, and again arose, my hand outstretched to give the blessing, if blessing there might be in such an hour. The congregation arose to receive the proffered benediction, but before my lips had opened, a faint hand plucked my gown.

"I will speak, sir," and pale and trembling the unhappy man rose and stood beside me. I resumed my seat and the people dumbly did the same, gazing towards their elder with eyes that pleaded for the assurance of his innocence. Twice or thrice he strove for utterance before the words would come. At length he spoke.

"Moderator and brethren," he began, "if such as I may call you brethren. I am a sinful man. My hour has come. God's clock has struck, and it is the stroke of doom for my unworthy soul. Not that I despair of final mercy, for mine is a scarlet sin, and for such there is a special promise. But God's rod hath fallen upon me. The Almighty hath scourged me through my own son; for he who has just gone forth is none other than mine own child. My heart went out to him since first I saw his face, though I

knew not till to-day that he is my flesh and blood. The picture you saw him hold out before me is none other than the picture of his mother's face.

"I speak it not for my defense—but I thought his mother was dead. I was told from the old country that she was gone, and more than one letter was returned to me with the statement that she could not be found. It was my heart's purpose to make a worthy home for her here in Canada, and to bring her out to it and to atone if I might for the cruel wrong. The first is long since done, but the second was beyond my power—at least so I was led to think.

"And now, Moderator, I place in your hands the resignation of the office on which I have brought such deep disgrace. It was my pride to be an elder in St. Cuthbert's, for it was here I first tasted of the Saviour's forgiving grace; it was here I first learned the luxury of penitence, and here was born my heart's deep purpose to retrieve the past—it was my pride, I say to be an elder here, but it is now my shame."

He was about to stop when Saunders McTavish interrupted:

"Moderator, there'll be no need to proceed by libel, for the accused party has confessed his guilt. But he hasna said anything to the Court about his soul, about his soul and his sin, and his relation to his God. At least, not all he might like to say and

we might like to hear. Mebbe he'll have had repentance unto life?"

I waited. Mr. Blake's response came with humble brokenness.

"Please God I have," he said, "and, unworthy though I be, I have a great word for my fellow men this day—a word the unfallen angels could not speak. Oh, my brethren, believe me, I have not been leading a double life. I took the eldership at your hands, I know, saying nothing of the dark blot that soiled the past. My humble hope was that in service I might seek to redeem my life and I remembered One who said to a guilty soul like mine:—'Feed My sheep.' Penitence, and not remorse, I thought, was well pleasing unto God.

"And you will bear me witness that I have tried to warn all, especially the young men, against the first approach of sin. I fell long years ago because I cherished sinful images in my heart till even love went down before them. Since then, God is my witness, I have made it my lifework to drive them forth and to make every thought captive to the Redeeming Christ. My lifework has not been in my foundry, nor in my town, nor in my church—but in my heart, this guilty heart of mine. I have striven to drive out evil thoughts—out, in the blessed name of Jesus. For long, I could not recall my sin with-

out sinning anew. But I had a hope of final victory, and having this, I purified myself even as He is pure.

"It was my daily prayer that God would make me useful, poor and all but sunken wreck as I was, that he would yet make me a danger signal to the young about me—which I am this day. For a wrecked ship does not tell of danger—it swears to the peril that itself has known. And to every young man before me I swear to two things this hour. The first is that your sin will find you out. Be sure of this. All our phrases about lanes that have no turning and the mills of the gods and justice that smites with iron hand, and chickens that come home to roost—all these are only names for God's unsleeping vigilance, all varied statements of the relentlessness of sin.

"The other truth to which I swear is this, that dark and bitter memories of evil may be a blessing to the soul, if we but count that sin our deadly enemy and rest not till we take vengeance of it. It may yet be God's messenger to us, if we lead humble chastened lives, seeking to redeem the past and watching unto prayer. There is no discipline so bitter and so blessed as the discipline of an almost ruined soul. For old sins do not decay and die; they must be nailed upon the cross. It is an awful truth that he who was once filthy is filthy still, but it is still more

true, thank God, that there is One whose blood cleanseth from all sin."

He stopped suddenly, and in a moment he was gone. Down that same aisle by which his child had passed, he swiftly walked, his head bowed, his face quivering in pain like one who was being scourged out of the temple. For there are corded whips, knotted by unseen hands.

After the door had closed behind him the Session Clerk arose:

"I move, Moderator," he said, "that Mr. Blake's resignation be laid on the table."

Before his motion was seconded Roger Lockie, one of the stalwarts, stood in the middle of the congregation.

"It's no becomin' in me to interfere," he began, "but we're a' assembled here as a worshippin' people, an' I move that the Kirk Session be requested no' to accept the resignation. Oor brother fell, nae doot, but it was lang syne, and he has walked worthy o' the Lord unto a' pleasin' since, an' borne a guid witness to his Maister. We a' ken fine what the great King an' Heid o' the Kirk wad dae wi' his resignation. Wi' my way o' thinkin', a sinfu' man wha has been saved by grace is juist the ane to commend the Maister's love. I move the Session be asked to keep him as oor elder."

"I second that," said William Watson, a man of fifty years. "He brocht me to Christ and that's ae soul he saved. He broke the alabaster box upon his Saviour's head this day and we a' felt the fragrance o't. If God Himsel' canna despise the contrite hairt, nae mair can we."

I was about to put the motion when the senior elder arose:—"I hae but a word," he said, "an' it's nae word o' mine. The spirit o' the cross is wi' us and I will read a bit frae the Buik:—'If a man be overtaken in a fault ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted.'"

"Are you ready for the question?" I asked.

"Aye, we're a' fine an' ready noo," said one of the worshippers.

The vote was taken and there was no dissenting voice. Michael Blake's long penance had done its work on earth and its eternal outcome was in other hands than ours.

XXIV

The SWEET SUNNY SOUTH

I WAS strongly inclined to accept the call. Not that I liked changes, for heart vines bleed freely when uptorn, and friendship's stocks cannot be bought on margin. But my heart was heavy, and St. Cuthbert's had been sorely wounded. Therefore, when the South Carolina church opened correspondence with me regarding their vacant pulpit, I lent an attentive ear.

All who have known sorrow in their work know how sweet sounds the voice, even the siren voice, which calls to distant scenes of toil. The world's weary heart will some day learn that no far-leading path, no journey by land or sea can separate us from the sorrow we seek to flee; because no path hath been discovered, no route devised, which shall lead us forth from our own hearts, where sorrow hath her lair.

Nevertheless, I was strongly minded to go forth from the work which had become my very life. It is nature's favourite paradox that what we love the most, the most hath power to give us pain. Could we withhold our love, no hand could wound us

sorely, for it takes a friend to make an enemy worth the name. And since I loved St. Cuthbert's with that love which only sacrifice can know, I was oppressed with a corresponding fear that her frown would quench whatever glimmer of gladness still flickered in my heart. For I had almost forgotten that ever I was glad. And is it to be wondered at?

My daughter's love was fixed upon a man whom I deemed impossible, though by no fault of his. She had renounced all purpose of their immediate union in deference to her father's protest, but her love was fixed upon him still, and her father felt like one who was beating back the spring. Her mother was torn with the torment of an armed neutrality. Further, my beautiful church had been scarred by the explosive riot of that ordination day, stricken with a soul's lightning; and the whole tragedy of our home life had been laid bare to every eye.

Margaret, and her love, and her lover, and her lover's genealogy, and her father's forbiddal of their marriage, all these were daily herbs to those who loved us, daily bread to native gossip-mongers, and daily luxury to all who wished us ill. My attitude towards Margaret's lover, and whether that attitude was right or wrong, was the especial subject of debate and all New Jedboro abandoned itself to a carnival of judgment. Even the most pious and in-

dulgent could not forego the solemn luxury, and those who denied themselves all of scandal's toothsome tidbits could not renounce this great repast.

I entertained no actual misgivings as to St. Cuthbert's permanent loyalty to me; but our self-consciousness had become raw and sore, our manse had turned suddenly to a house of glass, and the whole situation was so fraught with embarrassment that no mere man since the fall could have been free from an instinctive longing to escape.

St. Andrew's, Charleston, an ancient church of that ancient city, had offered me its pulpit. The Southerners have a taste for British blood, and they stand alone as connoisseurs of that commodity. Wherefore, the St. Andrew's folk had cast about for a British minister, preferring the second growth, hopeful that its advantage of American shade might have made its excellence complete.

Their committee ranged all Canada, finally dismounting beneath the stately steeple of St. Cuthbert's, their lasso loosed for action. Or, to change the metaphor, they informed their church at home that their eyes were fastened on their game at last; for the duty of such a committee is to tree their bird, then hold him transfixed by various well-known sounds till the congregation shall bring him down by well directed aim, bag him, and bear him off.

The Charleston Committee was composed of four, who attended St. Cuthbert's both morning and evening, when they came one Sabbath day to spy out the land.

The proprietor of the Imperial Hotel, himself an extinct Presbyterian, told me afterwards that they arrived late at night, begged to be excused from registering and went immediately to their rooms. But he knew in the morning that they were not to the manner born—for they asked for "oatmeal" for breakfast, which is called porridge by all who boast even a tincture of that blood it hath so long enriched.

Then they ate it with outward signs of enjoyment, which also flies in the face of all Scottish principle. Besides all this, they gave the maid a quarter, which was the most conclusive evidence of all.

They walked to St. Cuthbert's in four different detachments and sat in separate sections of the church. But they were not unnoticed; every Scotch section marked its man, for in New Jedboro strangers were events. I myself remarked three of them; devout they seemed and yet vigilant—as was natural, for they had come to both watch and pray.

The psalms were too much for them; they seemed to enter heartily into the other portions of the service —but the psalms in metre are a great Shibboleth. My beadle, who always sat where he could command the

congregation, has often assured me that when a psalm was announced he could soon tell the sheep from the goats.

The service passed without special incident; for, although I suspected their errand, all thought of it vanished when I came to preach. God's jealous care will hold to undivided loyalty the heart that seeks to serve Him.

Monday morning brought the deputation to close range. They interviewed me in my study, and the house was redolent of Southern courtesy and grace. Their accent had a foreign tang but their hearts' tone was that of universal love. This latter word is not too strong to use, for the Southerner has a rare genius for laying claim to your very heart by the surrender of his own. Affection blooms fast in the Southern soul, but our Northern bud needs time. Especially tardy is its ripening in Scottish hearts, but the fruit is to Eternity.

The conversation was one of great interest and pleasure to myself, and while I could give no definite promise I made no secret of the attractiveness of their proposal.

"You will be so good as to present our regards to the mistress of the manse," said one of them, as they rose to go.

"Thank you, it will give me great pleasure," I

responded; "my wife is a Southerner. Her father, who is not living now, fought at Gettysburg. My wife's standing instruction is to say that he was not killed in battle, for that was many years ago, and she has the Southern instinct for youth."

"And the Southern talent for it too, I reckon," the courtly gentleman replied. "We are mighty glad to hear that she belongs to us. Surely we will have a friend at Court. Let her be considered our plenipotentiary-extraordinary. Does her heart still turn towards her Southern home?"

"I am sure it does," I made reply, "but it has been long garrisoned within these rock-bound walls, and I know she has come to love them. I have often heard her say that there is no trellis for Southern vines like these mountainous hearts, true and faithful as the eternal hills themselves."

"I don't wonder at it," another of the deputation interposed. "From what I have seen and learned of these folk, I think they are our nearest kin. The Scotch and the Southern nature are alike, the same intensity of feeling, but with them it glows and burns, while with us it flames and sparkles."

"The same stream," suggested the first, "but ours breaks easier into flood."

"Well, I hope the flood will bear her back to her native shore," said the youngest member of the com-

mittee, who was a colonel, having been born during the Civil War.

We all laughed pleasantly at our racial distinctions and the gentlemen withdrew.

"We will not tell you good-bye, for we hope to see you soon again," was the last word I heard, the Southern idiom and the Southern cordiality both in evidence.

Definite action on the part of the Charleston church soon followed the return of their representatives. And I knew not what to do.

In the hope of relieving my perplexity, I accepted an invitation to spend a Sabbath with the St. Andrew's people and occupy their proffered pulpit.

My heart had sore misgivings when I said good-bye to Issie Hogg; her years were but thirteen; and every year had bound her closer and closer to my heart till I knew she was more dear to me than any other child save one. The sands of life were nearly run and I feared greatly lest they might be spent before I should return.

New Jedboro was winter-wrapped when I left it, and, taking steamer from New York, I disembarked at Charleston into almost intoxicating sweetness. Their dear South land was aflame with early summer, and my idea of Paradise was revised. How could these Southern hearts be otherwise than warm and fra-

grant! All the land about seemed like nature's temple, breathing forth its silent anthem and celebrating its perpetual mass.

Yet all its vernal beauty seemed but as a portal to the inner shrine, the sanctuary of Southern hospitality. Which hospitality is a separate brand and hath no rival this side the Gates of Pearl. Let all who would feel the surprise of heaven's welcome forego the luxury of a visit to a Southern home; for they have stolen that celestial fire to kindle their waiting hearths.

I was committed to the care of one of the families of St. Andrew's whose household numbered five; and every heart had many doors all open wide. That is, open wide till you had entered, for then they seemed tight closed, locked with a golden key. Ancient pride seemed to be their family possession, never flaunted, but suppressed rather—and you knew it only because your own heart acknowledged that this must be its rightful dwelling place.

I noted again the pleasing custom of Southern ladies, who shake hands on introduction, and forever after. The candid graciousness that marks the act is in happy contrast to the self-conscious agitation of the underbred and the torpid panic of their stifled bow.

My host and hostess were persons of rare interest

Some of England's best blood was in their veins; it had come to them by way of Virginia, in their eyes the last medium of refinement. The final touch of sanguinary indigo is given only at Virginia's hands, the Virginian aristocracy being a blessed union of the English chivalric and the American intrinsic, the heraldic of the old world blended with the romantic of the new—which might make the Duke of Devonshire proud to receive reordination at their hands.

English aristocracy ambles on in an inevitable path, high banked by centuries—but the Virginian hath leaped the hurdle of the ocean and still retained its coronet; which proves that it was fashioned in eternity after the express pattern of their patrician heads.

As I describe the lofty source of this gracious Southern household, I bethink myself that to this day I cannot tell how I came to know that theirs was an ancient family. No reference to it from their own lips can I recall; certainly no boast, except the tranquil boast of proud serenity and noble bearing, and the noblesse oblige of loving hearts.

Grave courtesy and sweet simplicity and mirthful dignity seemed to be the heirlooms which they shared as common heritors; and, chiefest of credentials, when they stood in the library amid the shades of ancestors preserved in oils, I felt no sense of humour in the situation.

This is a great tribute; for the plebeian may boast his ancestors but he dare not paint them; and many a pioneer aristocrat hath compassed his undoing because he thus tried to put new wine into old bottles. Wishing to found a family, he proceeds to find one, and both are covered with shame as with a garment.

Many of our new world nobility, finding in sudden wealth the necessity for sudden pedigree, have resurrected their ancestors and tried in vain to touch them into gentleness, committing to an artist the secret task of God. Even those who have made fortune in oils, consistently restoring their innocent forefathers by the same, have only advertised their weakness with their wares.

It is true that the Vardell family coat-of-arms was not concealed—but it was not brandished or expounded. In quiet but vigilant emblazonry, it seemed to stand apart, like some far back member of the family in whose pride it shared.

Which reminded me, by contrast, of a call I had once made upon a certain Northern family, conspicuously rich and conspicuously new. While waiting in the drawing-room, I observed four different crests, or coats-of-arms, framed and hanging in a separate place, smirking to one another in token of their youthful fortune; for the lines had fallen unto them in pleasant places.

Soon the mistress of the mansion swept into the room, her locomotion accompanied by a wealthy sound, silk skirts calling unto silk skirts as deep calleth unto deep. A little pleasant conversation ensued, which, among other things informed me that the Turkish rug beneath me had cost six hundred dollars; whereupon I anxiously lifted my unworthy feet, my emotion rising with them. After both had subsided, I sought to stir the sacred pool of memory, pointing reverently to one of the aforesaid emblems of heraldry.

"That is your family coat-of-arms, Mrs. Brown, is it not?" I asked, throwing wide the door for the return of the noble dead.

"Yes," she answered proudly, "that is my one, and that one there is Mr. Brown's, and those other two are the children's; the yellow one is Victoria's and the red one is Louisa Alexandra's. Mr. Brown bought them in New York, and we thought when we were getting them we might just as well get one apiece for the children too."

How rich and reckless, I reflected, is the spendthrift generosity of our new world rich!

I could not but recall how those mean old English families make one such emblem do for centuries, and the children have to be content with its rusty symbols. But this lavish enterprise cheered me by its

refreshing contrast; for every one was new, and each child had one for its very own.

There is no need to dwell on the succeeding Sabbath. St. Andrew's church bore everywhere the evidences of wealth and refinement. Large and sympathetic congregations were before me, evidently hospitable to the truth; for Huguenot and Scotch-Irish blood does not lose its ruling passion, and South Carolina has its generous portion of them both.

I sorely missed the psalms, without which, to those who have acquired the stern relish, a service lacks its greatest tonic. But my poor efforts seemed well received and the flood of Southern fervour burst forth later on, as we sat around the Vardells' dinner table.

I was being initiated into the mystic sweets of "syllabub," a Southern concoction of which my sober Scotch folks had never heard. Whoso takes it may not look upon the wine when it is red, for its glow is muffled by various other moral things; but the wine, waiting patiently at the bottom, cometh at last unto its own; and the glow which was absent from the cup may be soon detected upon the face of him who took it, beguiled by the innocent foliage amidst which the historic serpent lurks.

Webster defines it as a dish of cream, flavoured with wine, and beaten to a froth. But Webster was from Massachusetts and his advantages were few.

The cultured Southerner, more versed in luxury than language, knoweth well that it is a dish of wine, flavoured with cream, and not beaten at all since the foundation of the world.

Southerners incline to eulogy; and syllabubs insist upon it. Wherefore, after the third syllabub had run the same course that its fathers had run, Miss Sadie turned to me and said:

"That was a perfectly lovely sermon you preached to us this morning."

"You are very frank," quoth I, for I was unaccustomed to compliments, one every six or seven years, and an extra thrown in at death, being the limit of Scotch enthusiasm.

"Well," replied Miss Sadie, "I hope I am. I think it is sweet and lovely to tell people if you like them. What's the use of waiting till they're dead, before you say nice things about your friends? If folks love me, or think me nice, I want them to tell me so while I'm alive."

"I love you and I think you are sweet and beautiful," said I, obedient.

Then came a dainty Southern cry—not the bold squeal of other girls, nor the loud honking of those who mourn for girlhood gone—but the woman-note which only the Southern girl commands in its perfection.

"Father! Do you hear what that preacher said to me just now?" she cried archly. "Isn't it perfectly dreadful for him to say things like that to a simple maiden like me? You awful man!"

"Our guest is only flesh and blood, Sadie," answered the courtly father when his laughing ceased, "so I presume, like the rest of us, he thinks you lovely. As for his telling you so, he was only carrying out your own instructions."

"I don't see how you could have done anything else," laughed Mrs. Vardell. "You shut him up to it, you know, Sadie. After your precept, to have said nothing nice would have meant that there was nothing nice to say."

"But seriously," resumed Miss Sadie, turning again to me, "that was really a lovely sermon this morning. It is beautiful to be able to help a whole congregation like that."

"Yes," chimed in Miss Vardell, Sadie's sweet senior, "it was perfectly fascinating. I shall never forget it as long as I live."

"I really think you will have to let us speak our mind," added their mother. "Your Geneva gown was so becoming; I do so wish our Southern ministers would adopt it. And the sermon was perfect. I especially admired the way it seemed to grow out of

the text; they seemed to grow together like a vine twining around a tree."

I endured this tender pelting with the best grace I could command, though this was the first time I had ever been the centre of such a hosannah thunder-storm. The tribute to the kinship of text and sermon, however, was really very pleasing to me. Just at this juncture, when a new batch of compliments was about to be produced, smoking hot, an aged aunt, the prisoner of years, ventured an enquiry.

"I wish I could have been there—but I am far past that," she said. "What was the text, Sadie?"

Sadie flew into the chamber of her memory to catch it before it should escape. But the sudden invasion had evidently alarmed it, for it had gone. She silently pursued it into space, but returned empty-handed.

"That's strange," she faltered; "it was a lovely text," she added, by way of consolation. "But it's gone; I was so taken up with the sermon that I must have failed to remember the text," she concluded, false to her first love, but faithful to her guest.

"Well, Josie," said the still unenlightened aunt, "I will have to look to you. You will tell me what it was."

Josie joined in the chase, but their prey had had a noble start and was now far beyond them.

"It was in the New Testament, I think," said Josie, pleased with this pledge of accuracy, and satisfied that she had outrun her sister—"and it was tolerably long." This was said with the air of one who had almost identified it and might justly leave the rest to the imagination. "I reckon I could find it if I had a Bible," she added hopefully.

No Bible was produced, for that would have been taking an unfair advantage of the fugitive; but the eulogists began their mental search in unison, quoting various fragments of my morning prayer at family worship, which they carefully retained as witnesses. After they had ransacked every mental corridor in vain they acknowledged the fruitlessness of the quest, and I myself told their aged relative the text.

"Of course," they cried together, each repeating portions of it again and again in the spirit of atonement.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Vardell, "that the mind undergoes a kind of relaxation after a delicious tension such as we experienced to-day."

I marvelled greatly at this relentless sweetness.

"I knew it was in the New Testament," said Josie triumphantly—and we silently accorded her the praise that was her due.

But I inwardly bethought myself of those silent granite lips in the frozen North, unthawed by tender speeches, yet each one the reservoir of my texts and sermons, as unforgotten as they were unsung.

XXV

ST. CUTHBERT'S SECOND CALL

MY reluctant farewells had been said, my gracious entertainers had grown dim upon the wharf; and the Atlantic was greeting our ship with boisterous welcome. For the Atlantic is far travelled and loves to surprise those Southern shores with the waves of Northern waters.

One by one the passengers retired from the deck, some with slow dignity, some with solemn haste, and some with volcanic candour.

I remained, sharing the scant survival of the fit, and fell into a reflective mood, for I love to think to music, none so grand as the accompaniment of ocean. That mighty throat is attuned to the human; its cry of deep mysterious passion, its note of conflict, is the epitome of the universal voice. It accorded well with the mood that possessed me, for that mood was gray.

The prevailing thought was this—that I was going back to winter. Grim relapse this, I mused, to go forth from bud and bloom and bird, to pendant icicle and drifted snow. For the blood soon warms beneath Southern skies, and a man soon recognizes

that a garden was the ancestral home of him and of all mankind. Even the Eskimo can be traced to Eden.

Yes, I was going back to winter in very truth, without and within; for there is a sharper winter than any whose story the thermometer records. The winter of my discontent, and of another's blighted heart, and of still another's darkened life, awaited me beyond these turbid waters! My way was dark, and my path obscure before me. Chart and compass were blurred and numb. To remain in New Jedboro, and to remove to Charleston, seemed equally distasteful.

I had given the Southern church no assurance of my purpose, because purpose I had none. Yet the stern necessity of choice was upon me, this most sombre enfranchisement of manhood, that we are compelled to choose, willing or unwilling. Saint and sinner, believer and infidel, are alike under this compulsion in matters moral—and in all matters. We speak of the stern pressure which demands that men shall make a living; but its dread feature is herein, that our living is a succession of pregnant choices on which our deepest livelihood depends—and these choices melt into destiny, involving the infinite itself.

My people, I ruminated, could help me to a deci-

sion if they only would. But I knew how non-committal they would be; for they, and all their kind, are inclined to assume no responsibility of another's soul, and to surrender no fragment of their own.

New York was reached at last, the waves still tossing heavily. When I alighted from the train at New Jedboro, the breath of winter greeted me.

One of my parishioners, an Aberdonian born, was on the lookout. He shook hands, but said nothing of welcome home. Yet his hand was warm, and its grip had a voice that told me more than even sweet Southern lips could say. For its voice was bass—which is God's.

"Issie's wantin' ye," he said calmly. "She's far gone an' she's been askin' for ye."

The dawn as yet had hardly come, and seating myself upon the box, I told the cabman to drive quickly to Issie's home. As we passed through the still unstirring town, he said:

"He'll be sittin' up with him," pointing to a dimly-lighted window.

"Who'll be sitting up?" I said.

"Oh, I forgot. You won't have heard. That is Mr. Strachan's room. At least I think that is the name. I only came here myself to work ten days ago. A poor homeless woman landed here last week from Ireland. One of those immigration

agent devils over there took her last penny and sent her over to Canada, to starve for all he cared. She showed smallpox after she landed here and her little lad was with her. He took it too. Well, she died —but before she died she told her story. The old story, you know—had bad luck, you see, and the fellow skipped out and left her. The woman gets the worst of it every time, don't she?"

"She died!" I exclaimed. "And the little one? Where is the boy you spoke of?"

"That's him; that's what the light's burnin' for. Angus Strachan, so they say, paid all the funeral expenses, and they wanted to send the kid away somewheres—some hospital for them catchin' diseases. But Strachan acted queer about it. He wouldn't let them touch it. And he took it to his own room and said he would take care of it himself."

"And did they let him?" I asked.

"Let him. I just guess they did. They couldn't help it. You see he'd been in, monkeyin' round the smallpox already—so they had to. And he wrapped the kid up in a blanket and took it to his room. They say his light's never been out at night since."

"He has not taken the disease himself, has he?" I enquired.

"Oh, no; leastwise, I never heard tell of it. But them was queer actions for a young fellow, wasn't

they? No accountin' for tastes, as the fellow said! Can you understand it yourself, sir?"

"I think I can," was my reply; "let us hurry on," and in a few minutes we were at Issie's house.

Little Issie had long since snuggled down in her own separate place in my heart; she was indeed a favourite with all who knew her—but I saw as I stepped into the room that God loved her best of all. The white thin hands were tightly held, one in her father's, the other in her mother's, as though they would detain her; but the angels heeded not and went on with the preparations for her flight. These were almost complete when I arrived; Issie alone knew that they were of God's providing, for the face she turned to me was full of childish sweetness, and her smile was touched with other light.

"I'm glad you're home," she whispered, as I bent low beside her. "Please don't go away again"—and as I kissed her she was gone.

Her curls were gold, still gold, though she was gone. As we stood weeping beside the precious dust the sun arose, still arose, though she was gone. And his first errand was to the broken heart. Swift to the window flew his first-flung rays, like eager couriers who hear the cry of need. And entering in, unbidden, they set God's brighter seal of love upon the golden tresses. Up and down among the glowing

strands, they wandered, smiling at God's gain, smiling still, though she was gone. Unafraid, they caressed the unconscious locks, anointing them for their burial.

When I went out, the winter seemed past and gone; I knew then what made these snowbound hearts so warm.

* * * * * *

"Margaret has a new sorrow," said my wife, soon after my arrival home.

"What is it?"

"A young woman and her child from Ireland—"

"Yes," I interrupted, "I heard about it; the driver told me. Does Margaret seem to fret herself about it?"

"I don't know," answered her mother, "but I am afraid it has made it all the harder for us: I mean that I fear that she is more devoted to him now than ever. She read me a letter Angus wrote her just before he shut himself up with the child."

"What did it say?" I asked, with eagerness.

"I don't remember very clearly: but he said that this woman who died of smallpox, the child's mother, you know, had opened all her heart to him before she died. And he says there never was a gentler or purer-hearted woman—the old story, of love, and trust, and anguish. Then he said he promised her to care for her boy; and he said something about his

ordination vows, said he would try to be true to them, and that this would help him to banish revenge and hatred from his heart."

"His ordination vows?" I exclaimed, "what do you suppose he means? Surely he is not trifling with all that unhappy occurrence?"

"I don't think so. There was no trifling tone about his letter. I asked Margaret about that very thing, but she wouldn't tell me, only she said there was no elder in St. Cuthbert's more ordained to God's service than Angus is."

"Did she say anything about their love affairs?" said I, after a man's poor bungling fashion.

"Not a word—but she wouldn't let me see the letter," this with a little womanly sigh: for women, like children, have griefs that appear trifling to grown men, but are very real to them.

After a pause my wife ventured: "Don't you think that perhaps we are just a little unrelenting about Margaret and Angus?"

"What?" I said.

"Oh, I don't mean that she should marry him, of course, but it does seem hard, father—and it really wasn't his fault—and perhaps we will regret it some day."

"But, my dear, you know it is impossible—think of the humiliation of it, the shame of it, I might say."

"Yes, I know," she answered, "but I do admire Angus more and more. He seems to be trying to staunch his sorrow, only he does it by love and service. Everybody is talking about how useful and unselfish he is, in the church, and among the poor—and everywhere."

"I know it," admitted I, "I know it, and there is no reason why we should not always be friends—but the other is an entirely different matter. It cannot be."

"Well," went on my wife, "I do not think I want to stay here; I don't suppose the people understand everything, but I feel sure many of them think we are dealing harshly with Margaret. And yet they would nearly all do the same. What kind of a manse have they in Charleston?" she concluded eagerly—for a woman's gift of transition is marvellous.

Whereupon I told her all about my Southern experiences and impressions.

* * * * * *

There was no tumult in St. Cuthbert's. A man who knows nothing of the under-currents in the heart's great ocean would have said that my people were serenely indifferent as to whether I should stay in New Jedboro or go to Charleston. There was no open attempt to influence the outcome, for they believed in the sovereignty of God and would not in-

terfere—at least not till that very sovereignty so constrained them. Of course, they held prayer to be a legitimate interference. This is a great mystery, but it is cherished by the soul as persistently as it is challenged by the reason. Mysterious though this union must ever be, the Scottish spirit takes full advantage of it, and enjoys its fruit, let the root be hidden as it may.

"Ye'll be givin' us yir decision some o' these days," was about as far as the most emotional would go, some even adding: "Charleston's a graun city, nae doot, an' I'm hopin' ye'll like it fine if you leave us," which last proved to me that such an one secretly prayed for my remaining. The true Scotchman is like the Hebrew language—to be understood, he must be read backwards.

"It's a graun chance ye're gettin', to be called to sic a kirk as that," said Wattie Gardner one day. "I'm fearin' ye'll rue it if ye bide wi' us here."

This was far from the language of ardent wooing; yet I noticed that this same Wattie sought to reform his ways, that they might tend to the increase of my comfort. He had been an incorrigible sleeper in the kirk, surrendering to sweet repose with the announcement of the text, and emerging therefrom only to join the closing paraphrase with unembarrassed unction. For no man was more ready with a verdict on

the sermon than was Wattie, as he walked down the aisle; he never failed to demand the "heads and particulars" from his family at the dinner table, resenting all imputation of somnolence for himself.

His defense was plausible, since he never slept exposed; but always with his head bowed upon the book-board, esteemed by the uncharitable as the attitude of slumber, but explained by Wattie as the posture of undistracted thought and pious meditation.

Shortly after my call to Charleston, however, Wattie abandoned this pious and reflective posture, sitting bolt upright, beating back his tendency to thoughtful retirement with the aid of cloves and peppermints. I knew the meaning of this reform, for I knew Wattie's love for me, clandestine though it was; he and I had watched death together once—and after the wave had overswept us, the ground beneath our feet was firm as rock forever.

By and by St. Cuthbert's began to move. It was known that I purposed announcing my decision on the approaching Sabbath day, and I was informed that one or two deputations wished to wait upon me at the manse. The first was from the women of the church, who had had a meeting of their own.

To my amazement the spokeswoman was Mrs. Goodall. Now it must be told that this same Mrs. Goodall, in all sincerity of conscience, had violently

withstood my advent to the pastorate of St. Cuthbert's years before. The ground of her opposition was that I plied the festive pipe.

Never was there nobler Christian womanhood than hers, never a more devoted life, never a more loving heart. But no man's character could be fragrant, so she thought, if it ripened amid the rich aroma of tobacco; and good old Virginia leaf was to her the poison-ivy of mankind. That life was indeed beclouded which found shelter in the genial clouds of the aforesaid leaf. But with all this heroic hostility to our little weaknesses, there dwelt a sweet strain of innocence in which we had come to glory.

"Ye needn't tell me," said the good Mrs. Goodall once to a sympathetic circle, "that they dinna play poker at the taivern—an' in the daytime too—for I passed by this verra day, an' they were pokin' away, wi' their coats off, wi' lang sticks in their hands, pokin' at the wee white balls," and her listeners needed no other proof.

The dear old saint made her plea for those she represented, and it greatly pleased me, for I loved her well; and I remembered the scores and hundreds who had felt the power of her godly life. Besides, it confirmed me in this assurance, that, after all is said and done, if a man is honestly trying to do his Master's work, even those most sternly set against the

pipe will care but little whether or not he seeks the comfort it undoubtedly affords. Which very thing had been proved by my great predecessor, Dr. Grant, half a century agone.

The second, and larger, deputation was composed of ten or more, appointed to represent the kirk session and the Board. Of this latter body, the principal spokesman was its chairman, William Collin, an excerpt from Selkirkshire and one of my chiefest friends. He was long, very long, almost six feet three, with copious hair that never sank to rest, and habitually adorned with a cravat that had caught the same aspiring spirit. This was a rider perpetually attached.

One suit of clothes after another, as the years passed by, bore witness to the loyalty of his heart; for he would not abandon the pre-historic tailor who was a sort of heirloom in the Collin family. In consequence, the rise and fall of William's coat, in its caudal parts, as he walked down the aisle with the plate on the Sabbath day, had become part of St. Cuthbert's ritual—and we all thought it beautiful. He was one of the two, referred to in the opening of our story, who had been sent to spy out the land, and to report upon the propriety of my conjugal enterprise. The fluent panegyric in which his report was made is already recorded and need not be here repeated.

William had a talent for friendship beyond that of any man I ever knew, and this talent flowered into genius only after the clock struck midnight. Never yet was there friend who would stay with you to the last like William Collin, his shortcomings few, his long-stayings many and delicious.

For never yet was friend so welcome, never speech more sane and stimulating; never farewell so sweetly innocent when the clock struck two. May the God of friendship bless thee, William Collin, for all that thy friendship hath been to me! And if these lines outlive thee, let them bear witness to that joy which is not denied to the humblest man, who hath but a fireplace and a friend and a pipe—and four feet on the fender, while the storm howls without. For, with alternate zeal, we cast the blocks upon the blaze—and its flame never faltered till thou wert gone.

William, as chairman, was the first to speak. He presented St. Cuthbert's case with dignity and force, beginning with the tidings that the Board wished me henceforth to take two months' holidays instead of one. This started in my mind a swift reflection upon the native perversity of the Scotch. To prove that they cannot do without you, they banish you altogether for an extra month, but William Collin gave the thing a more graceful turn:

"We love you weel eneuch to do without you—but no' for lang," he said.

Then he concluded, as was his inviolate custom, with a reference to Burns, in whom he had sat down and risen up for forty years:

"I canna better close what I hae to say," he assured me, "than by the use o' the plowboy's words, slightly changed for the occasion:

> "'Better lo'ed ye canna be
> Will ye no' abide at hame?'"

With this he reached behind him (this too, a time-honoured custom), seized the aforesaid caudal parts of his coat, removed them from the path of descending danger, and lowered his stalwart form with easy dignity, his kindly eyes aglow with friendship's light.

David Carrick was the next to speak. Cautious and severe, his chief aim was to express the hope that I was sincere in my indecision.

"We had a sair shock wi' a former minister long years ago," he said, "he had a call, like yirsel', but he aye kept puttin' us off, tellin' us he was aye seekin' licht frae above; but Sandy Rutherford saw an or'nary licht in the manse ae nicht after twal o'clock. He peekit in the window, an' he saw the minister wi' his coat off, packin' up the things. The twa lichts kind o' muddled him, ye ken."

His colleagues may have thought David unnecessarily severe. In any case several of them began signalling to Geordie Bickell to take the floor. Geordie responded with much modesty and misgiving, for he was the saintliest man amongst us; and his own estimate of himself was in direct antagonism to our own.

"We willna urge ye, sir," he said, with a winsome smile, "but I'm sure the maist of us hae been pleadin' hard afore a higher court than this. A' I want to tell ye is this—there hasna been wound or bruise upon yir relation to yir people. An' there's but ae hairt amongst us, an' we're giein' ye anither call this day—an' we're hopin' it's the will o' God."

The interview was almost closed, when a voice was heard from the back of the room, a very eager voice, and charged with the import of its message:

"It's mebbe no' worth mentionin'," said Archie Blackwood, a fiery Scot whose father had fought at Balaclava, "but it's gey important for a' that. Gin ye should gang to Charleston ye'll hae to sing sma' on their Fourth o' July, for that's their screechin' time, they tell me; an' ye wudna hae a psalm frae year's end to year's end to wet yir burnin' lips—an' ye wadna ken when it was the Twenty-fourth o' May. They tell me they haena kept the Twenty-fourth o'

May in Ameriky since 1776." Archie knew his duty better than his dates.

I assured him of the importance of his warnings, and acknowledged the various deprivations he had foretold.

"Juist ae word afore we pairt," suddenly interjected a humble little elder who had never been known to speak before. "It's in my conscience, an' I want to pit it oot. We a' ken fine we haena been ower regular at the prayer meetin'; but we'll try to dae better in the time to come. It's death-bed repentance, I ken, but it's better than nane."

One by one the delegates shook hands with me and withdrew, after I had promised them as early a pronouncement as my still unsettled mind could hope to give. After they had gone, I sat long by myself, pondering all that had been said, looking for light indeed, but striving to quench all other beams than those whose radiance was from above.

While thus employed, a feeble footfall was heard upon the steps, and a gentle knocking called me to the door. It was no other than little Issie's grandfather who stood before me.

"Come in, come in," I said cordially, for he was dear to me, and we had the bond of a common sorrow. "Have you forgotten something?"

"No," he answered, "but I hae minded something.

I didna speak when a' the ithers spoke; but I want to tell ye something by yirsel'. I think ye ought to ken. It has to dae wi' yir decision.

"Ye mind wee Issie? Well, the mornin' ye came back frae Charleston, she was lyin' white an' still on the pillow. She hadna spoke a' through the nicht, an' we a' thocht she wad speak nae mair—but at six o'clock yir train blew afore it came into the station. An' wee Issie stirred on the pillow. Her lips moved an' I pit doon my ear.

"'He'll be on that train,' she whispered low. 'Wha'll be on the train?' I askit her. 'The minister,' was a' she said.

"I was alane wi' her, an' I said: 'Mebbe so, Issie.' Then she spoke nae mair for a little, but soon she said: 'God 'll bring him back to open the gate for me before I go. Grandfather,' she said, 'he first told me of the gate and he said I would find it beautiful when I got close—and so it is—but I want him to push it farther open, for I am so weak and tired. I'm sure God will bring him home in time.'"

My eyes were wet, and I could only take the old man's hand in mine, the silent token that the greatest argument of all had been kept until the last.

"There's mair of us," he said, as the sobs shook his feeble frame, "there's mair of us wha's comin' near the gate. I'm no' far frae it mysel'. An' I

want ye to wait my turn; I want ye to bide wi' us till ye see me through the gate. A stranger wadna be the same. I maun be gaun."

It is long now since Issie's grandfather followed her through the gate. He too found it beautiful; for I walked with him till even I could see its glory. It swung wide open, for he was welcome home; and I caught a glimpse of the splendour just beyond. I heard, too, rapturous snatches of the song they sing in that better land. It may have been fancy, yet I am sure I heard the old precentor's voice, and Issie's holy strain was clearer still; but it was the new song, and these two blended wondrous well.

XXVI

LOVE'S SINGING SACRIFICE

DEATH is kinder than we think. None other knew the way by which the little foundling's mother had gone forth. But death knew it well, having often passed over it before; and the orphan's cry was more than he could bear. So he took him in his kindly arms and bore him on to his mother, smiling at the cruel names by which he was accustomed to be called.

It is death's way to take the jewel only, for the road is long; and who will may have the casket. Wherefore the affrighted undertaker bore the latter by night to its resting-place, for he knew that path and had often trodden it before. But he was not a deep sea pilot, like the other.

Angus was left alone. A faithful man, himself a smallpox graduate, was his only companion. Strict care was kept before the door of the now deserted house, for panic hath its home in the heart of that dread disease, though not so dreadful as we think.

Some of the misguided folk of New Jedboro fumigated themselves at every mention of Angus' name, sleeping meantime side by side with some consump-

tive form, knowing not that death slept between them. But the great science of life is, and hath ever been, the recognition of life's real enemies.

Angus was alone—and fallen. The foundling's plague was upon him, and there was none to care for him but the faithful servant, smallpox-proof as he happily knew himself to be.

The very night of the poor waif's hasty burial, a note was handed in at our kitchen door. It was from the health officer of New Jedboro:

"Can you find a nurse for Mr. Strachan?" it ran. "He has no one with him but Foster, who has had the disease, and I need not tell you the necessity for a woman's care. I have tried the hospital, but no nurse will volunteer. Whoever goes, of course, will be under quarantine, as the guard has orders to let no one enter or leave the house. Perhaps you may know of some poor woman, or some kind of woman, who will undertake the duty. If you do, I have ordered the guard to let her into the house on presentation of this note."

My wife and I were sitting in the study when the letter was handed to me. "I will run down to Mrs. Barrie's," I said, after long thinking. "She is not so much of a nurse, but she is less of a coward; and I know she has taken care of diphtheria."

"I will walk down with you," said my wife; "per-

haps a woman's influence won't be amiss on such an errand."

We were soon ready and went out into the winter night.

"Isn't that too bad?" I suddenly exclaimed, as we were turning into Mrs. Barrie's house. "I have forgotten that letter—and the health officer says that whoever goes must have it. Shall we go back for it?"

"Not at all, she would have retired before we get back. And in any case she would not go till the morning, and you can give it to her before that," said my long tried adviser.

"Very well, let us go in."

We had left Margaret at home. She was often absent from our study fire, not in peevishness, or gloom, for they were foreign to her nature; but still she bore evidence of her great renunciation.

As I have said, she was much alone, deeming it, I doubt not, due to her lover that she should share his solitude, even if separately borne. She sought to fill up that which was behind of the sufferings of the man she loved. This I make no doubt was her secret delight; for only a woman knows the process of that joy which is exhaled when sorrow and love flow mingled down.

Margaret had not been beside our study fire that winter night. But on our departure she came down

from her half widowed room to sit beside it. It was the same hearth she had kindled in other days "in expectation of a guest." As she entered the room, her eye fell upon the note which I had left lying in my chair. A glance at it revealed to her Angus' name. It was soon perused and it needed to be read but once. Swift action followed, for there is no such thinker as the heart; and if women were on the Bench to-morrow, "Judgment reserved" would vanish from our judicial records.

Margaret's decision was taken before she laid the letter down, and a flush of eager joy glowed on her face. In a moment she was back in her room, quickly moving here and there, gathering this and that together, bending over a small travelling-bag that lay upon the bed. Her ruling thought was one of gladness, even joy—and the traveller's joy at that. Who does not know the sudden thrill of rapture when there comes to us a sudden summons to a long and unexpected journey?

And Margaret was starting on a long journey, how long, only God could tell. She thought of this as she glanced about the pretty room that had shared her secret thoughts since childhood, that had seen the awaking of her love, and had oftentimes kept with her the vigil of unsleeping joy. More than once the poor little room had feared it was soon to be out-

grown, and left far behind; but still at night Margaret would return to its pure protection, and still it knew the fragrance of a virgin's trembling love.

She was almost through the door when she turned once again and bade it a long farewell, the same as a maiden on her bridal morn. For she too was on her way to an altar; and the vows for sickness or health, for life or death, seemed to be upon her now.

She had got as far as the garden gate when she stopped suddenly.

"I have forgotten the letter," she said to herself. Laying her travelling-bag upon the ground, she ran swiftly back, but the door had locked behind her, and her latch-key was in her room.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" she cried to herself. "I cannot get in without the letter, and they will soon be back."

She flew along the veranda to a window and pressed it upward. It yielded, and her joy flowed like a river. Up she flung it, far up, and with a bound the active form was upon the sill and disappeared into the room. The letter lay where she had left it, and in a moment the precious passport was in its hiding-place. A moment later, the gate swung shut behind her. Her bosom throbbed with a new courage as it felt the touch of the letter that was entrusted to its keeping; for this was her war-

rant, her pledge of passage on that long journey towards which she pressed so eagerly. Oh, woman! who countest pestilence thy friend when it is in league with love!

On she pressed, on through the frosty night. The snow made music beneath her hurrying feet, the bridge by which she crossed the river cracked and echoed with the frost, and the Northern lights flashed the signals of their heavenly masonry—for what knew they of plague and love and sorrow, and of the story of this poor tracing-board of time?

But Margaret never thought of this, for she, too, had her own secret symbols, and her heart its own mighty language, voiced, like the other's, in alternate floods of light and gloom.

She never paused till she was challenged by the guard before the plague-struck house. Then she laid down her travelling-bag, for it had grown heavy; but her eyes never turned from the dim light that shone from the window. Love and danger were there, and the fascination of both was upon her.

"Where might you be goin', miss?" said the guard. His voice was thick, and his breath bore a perfume which proved he had been hospitably entreated by some sympathetic friend. Doubtless it was the good Samaritan's wine that had failed of its destination.

"I am going into that house, if you please," replied Margaret. "I am going to take care of Mr. Strachan. The health officer has asked for a nurse."

"Oh, no, my lady," said the guard, "no pretty face like yours is going to be marked by the smallpox." His chivalry was of the moist kind, and his emotion made him hiccough several times.

Margaret winced: "I am entitled to go in," she said boldly, "and I will thank you to let me pass," with which she picked up her valise.

"Not by no means," the guard rejoined. "I've got orders not to let no one in without a letter from the officer."

"I have the letter," said Margaret, for in her excitement she had forgotten it. She produced it and handed it to the man. He walked over to a gas lamp across the street. Feeling the need of exercise, he proceeded thereto by several different routes. Having reached it, he was seized with a great fear lest the iron post should fall, and lent himself to its support. Then he read the letter over aloud; three or four times he read it, punctuating it throughout with the aforesaid tokens of emotion. He returned to where she stood, selecting several new paths with fine originality.

"I guess that's all right, an' you're the party," he remarked, "but it ain't signed."

"What do you mean?" said Margaret in alarm. "It certainly bears the health officer's name. I saw it myself."

"Oh, yes, that's all right, but that ain't enough—business is business, you see," he added, with maudlin solemnity. "You've got to sign it yourself, kind of receipt the bill, you see."

He fumbled in his pocket for a pencil, produced the rump thereof, spread the letter upon his knee, and began writing on the back of it. It was like an internal surgical operation, for his tongue protruded as he wrote, marking his progress by a series of serpentine writhings that suggested inward pain.

"There, that'll do," he said, when he emerged. "You sign that."

Margaret took the paper and tried to read what he had written. But, unfamiliar with hieroglyphics, his handiwork was lost upon her.

"I cannot read it," she said presently; "the light is very bad."

"That's so—besides it's too infernal cold to read—I'm awful cold. I wisht that cove in there'd get a move on him, an' get better. He's got a snap. Some one sent him a bottle of milk to-day, too," he concluded, with a solemn wink, the tongue again appearing on the scene to bear internal witness—"but I forgot—I'll read them words to you myself," which

he proceeded to do, swaying gently, for the spirit of rhetoric was within him.

"This is it," he began, "'I'm the party what's meant to nurse the man what's got the smallpox, an' I got in because I wanted to'—that's all right, ain't it? Now you sign that, an' if you die, that'll protect me after you're dead. And I'll sign it too, and if I die, it'll protect you after I'm dead, see? And if we both die, it'll protect the officer after we're both dead, see? And if he dies, then we'll all be protected, because we'll all be dead, see? You keep the paper, and I'll keep the pencil, and we'll both keep our job, see? Gee whittaker! Ain't it cold! I wisht they'd send some more milk."

Impatient for a release, Margaret signed the document. After its author had made another picturesque pilgrimage to the gas lamp and back again, the signature was fervently commended, with signs of increasing emotion; he returned the letter to her—and she passed on into the house at which none but love or death would have asked for bed and board.

There are a thousand streams that flow from Calvary. But the deepest of these is joy. Wherefore as Margaret walked into the darkened house, her heart thrilled with a sudden rapture it had never known before. For he was there—and she would be beside

him in a moment—and they would be together—and none could break in upon them, for grim death himself would guard the door. He was helpless too, dependent on weak arms that love would gird with might—and this makes a woman's happiness complete; when love and service wed, joy is their first-born child.

She was now standing at the door of his room, her eyes fixed upon the face of the man she loved, radiant with victory.

He had heard her footfall from the threshold, and his heart clutched each one as it fell. Yes, it was she, and the music of her rustling garments had the sweet sound of rain—for his was the thirsty heart. It was surely she, and not another,—and the whole meaning of life seemed clear to him. He knew not how or why, but he had been alone so long, and his hungry heart had wondered, and life seemed such a wounded thing.

But now he actually saw those silken strands, gently waving from her haste, and the parted lips that poured forth her soul's deep loyalty, and the dear form of ardent love—a maiden's form. All these came upon him like the dawn, and the citadel of life's frowning mystery was stormed at last. How voluptuous, after all, in its holiest sense, is God's purpose for the pure in heart!

She stood, her eyes now suffused with tears, but smiling still; the panic in her father's house, the comment of cruel tongues, the fight with death, the pestilence that walks in darkness—these were all forgotten in the transport of her soul. She had chosen her Gethsemane long ago, and this was its harvest time.

Angus' eyes drank deeply from the spring.

"Margaret," he said at last, "how beautiful God is!"—and Margaret understood.

She advanced towards the bed, her hands outstretched—he sought to bid her back.

"Margaret, you know not what you do; your life——" But it was in vain.

"My life is my love," she cried with defiant passion. "Oh, Angus, how beautiful God is!" and, stooping down, she overpowered him, spurning death while love should claim its own.

As she stood above him again, her lips were moist with love's anointing and she knew that nothing could prevail against them now. Hers the promised power that could take up serpents, and drink deadly things, and be unharmed. Hers the commission to lay hands on the sick that they might recover. Her sombre foes seemed many; shame clouded the name she fain would bear, opposition frowned from the faces of those who bore her, and now plague had

joined the conspiracy—but in all these things she was more than conqueror.

* * * * * *

The winter had retreated before the conquering spring, and the vanquished pestilence had also fled when they came forth again, these prisoners of love. Nearly four long luscious weeks had flown, and their souls' bridal time was past. They had baffled death together; and they came forth, each with the great experience—each with the unstained heart.

Angus bore a scar, only one, as the legacy of pestilence—but it could be clearly seen, and it was on his brow.

"My life seems doomed to these single scars," he had said, not bitterly, during one of the sweet convalescent days.

"But not through any fault of yours, dear one," Margaret had answered. "I have the same wounds, mark for mark, but they are in my heart," and she kissed his brow, ordained to another burden.

"Where shall we go?" said Margaret. He had heard the words before, and rich memories came back. The freedom of the world was theirs; for they had been absolved from the stigma of disease, and the sentinel had ceased from his labours.

"I must go home now," she continued, "for it will soon be dark."

"I had forgotten about darkness," said Angus. "Come with me. I want to do something for my mother's sake."

"'Your mother's sake!'" she repeated, "did your mother ever know the poor woman who died of the disease? or her little child? Did you care for them for her sake?"

"I cared for them for her sake," Angus answered, "but my mother never knew her; they lived in different countries—but their sorrows were related. Let us turn here."

They turned off into a quiet street, and presently entered the old stone-cutter's shop. Angus spoke to him apart for a time; finally the old man said:

"Perhaps you'd better write it down."

"Very well, I will," replied Angus.

The old stone-cutter adjusted his glasses: "Nothin' on the big stone about her age?"

"No, nothing," answered Angus.

"Nor nothin' about her folks?"

"No, nothing," said Angus again.

"And nothin' on the little stone only this?"

"Nothing more," said the other.

"All right, sir, I understand then. The big stone is just to have 'Luke. 7 : 47: For she loved much,' and the little one: 'My brother.' All right, I'll set 'em up to-morrow, only I kind o' thought it

didn't give a terrible lot of information. But I suppose you know the meanin' of it."

"Yes, I know," said the man with the mark upon his brow.

XXVII

The HIDDEN CRUCIFIX

WE had only one incurable sorrow in St. Cuthbert's manse. That of course had to do with Margaret and her love—for whoso would heal sorrow must find a cure for love. We could not find it in our hearts to give her up to a union so wounding to our pride as her marriage to Angus would have been. The righteous will have cried out long ago against this unseemly spirit on the part of a gospel minister. But my only care is to set down things, myself among them, as they really were.

Besides, it is easy to prescribe sacrifices for another, or even for one's self, provided always that they be made before the necessity arises. All parents are models in their treatment of each other's offspring, rivalling, in this regard, even those proverbial patterns who never took the initial step to parentage.

Our relations with Margaret were happy enough, marked by love and tenderness as of yore. We were deliberately cheerful, and at times even resolutely gay. But our house had its skeleton closet,

and each of us kept a key. Apart from this, all our home was bright. Other wounds had healed. Margaret was home again, and she had been kept from the scourge's awful breath. I had accepted St. Cuthbert's second call, and I felt as though my pastorate had begun anew; for young and old gathered about me, and the chariot wheels rolled gladly.

Yet one dear and long honoured face was absent; and one seat in St. Cuthbert's, long occupied by a familiar form, was vacant now. For Michael Blake had gone.

Silently, without telling us why or where, he had departed, although the heart of all New Jedboro seemed warm to him, and although St. Cuthbert's had given him its pledge of continued confidence. But he had steadfastly refused to resume the duties of his office.

This was almost a sorer wound to us than the other; for we somehow could not but construe it as the collapse of shame. He shirks the discipline of God, we said, or thought; and some even voiced the darksome fear that he had cast off the restraints of his office, done with religion when he could no longer wear its mask. He would be a saint, said some, or nothing. The rôle of the publican has no charm for him, said others, because he never really knew its luxuries. And some were secretly angry

that he had escaped, as they chose to term it, for they loved to see the scarlet letter on another's breast.

* * * * * *

It was one of the first genial days of early spring, and an ocean steamer was swiftly making for the Mersey. The green fields of the initial isle had been declared the greenest of God's green earth, and they received the panegyric with national complacency, knowing not that they had three thousand miles of grassless ocean to thank for it every bit. The fragrance of the land was sweet to the weary voyagers, and the most taciturn was disposed to unwonted mirth. The Captain, question-driven, had taken wing and soared aloft, looking down in safety from the bridge.

But neither mirth nor gladness was upon the face of one traveller, though no face was turned more intently towards the shore. Sadness of heart and seriousness of purpose were there instead, not unmixed with light; for memory and hope, these old-world combatants, had joined battle in his soul.

His gaze was fixed on the still distant land, and varying emotions played upon his face. This very shore enclosed all whose memory filled his life with shame and sorrow—within it, therefore, by God's unchanging law, must be found their relief and cure.

For the serpent's bite, the healing is the serpent still, but lifted high.

This man, so silent and self-contained, had been the centre of much curious wonder among his fellow passengers. Much apart he had been, unmingled with the ship's social life, despite all allurement. The children called him blessed, for he had entered with their own relish into all their games, and when these palled, he had brought forth things new and old out of the treasure of his mind. The aged and ailing were his almost worshippers, for he had made their wants his daily care.

"I am sorry to part, Mr. Blake, although we have seen so little of you on the voyage. One has to be quite young, or quite sick, or quite old, to see much of you aboard ship."

"You have neither of the last two qualifications," answered the man addressed, with a pleasant smile.

The voice which had broken in upon his reverie was that of a lady past middle life, richly and fashionably dressed; for you never know the real plumage of fair travellers till they are about to leave you. She was beautifully enamelled, powdered, massaged, and otherwise put in the best possible repair. Sparkling diamonds adorned her hands. A gold cross hung upon her bosom.

"Nor the first one either, I fear," she rejoined; "however, I am trying to keep as young as I can. I do wish we were at Liverpool. There is to be a bridge party at one of my friends this afternoon and a military ball to-night, and I had counted on getting in for both. I accepted from New York! I am not thinking so much about the ball, but I shall die if I miss the bridge."

"Indeed," replied her companion, glancing at the cross.

"Yes, it will be too cruel. I have picked up some awfully good points on bridge—got them in New York. I got them from my friend's clergyman, the Rev. Dyson Bartlett, rector of the Holy Archangels. He is a lovely man. You'd never think to hear him preach that there was so much in him. Do you know of him?"

"No," answered Mr. Blake, "I don't think I ever heard of him before."

"Probably not; he lives a very quiet life—very restful sort of nature, he has; he never gets up till eleven; but of course he is always up very late at night. Can't burn the candle at both ends, can you? Clergymen are only human, and must get their rest. But on Sunday mornings he gets up at half-past six for early mass, and of course he plays on Saturday nights too, so sometimes he must get very little

sleep. Clergymen don't have such an easy life after all. Are you an Episcopalian, Mr. Blake?"

"No, I don't belong to that church."

"Isn't that too bad? But I don't know why I should say that. I think lots of people go to heaven who belong to other churches. But then, of course, I am very broad in my views. I can't bear narrow people—I just can't stand narrow people; and besides, I met a lovely man once in Tarrytown, and he was a Presbyterian. I hope I will meet him in heaven."

"I hope you will," said Mr. Blake.

"Yes," she resumed, "that is what I liked about Mr. Bartlett—he was so broad in his views. I remember I asked him once if he thought dissenters would go to heaven, and I shall never forget how beautifully he spoke. We were having a little game at the time—only a dollar stake—and it was his turn to play. But when I asked him that about the dissenters, he laid down his cards on the table, and his hands unconsciously took hold of the cross he always carried on his coat, and he said: 'God is very merciful, Mrs. Drake'—then he dropped the cross, and took up the cards again, and gave a little sigh before he played, and there was a beautiful smile on his face—a kind of sad, sweet smile."

"Did you attend his church when in New

York?" said her listener, not knowing what else to say.

"Yes, sometimes, but you wouldn't think he had such deep thoughts, just from hearing him preach. He was very deep. One night we were all discussing whether it was a sin to play for stakes. It was after the game was over, and Mr. Bartlett had won the whole thing. He put the money away quietly in his pocket—he gives it to the poor people in the Holy Archangels, he said, for some of the Holy Archangels are quite poor—he put it quietly in his pocket, and he took hold of his cross, and he was silent for a little while. Then he said: 'Stakes are everywhere in life—faith itself stakes the soul,' and that sad, sweet, smile came back again. Wasn't that deep?"

"Yes, very deep," answered Mr. Blake, thinking of the pocket.

"Another time, I remember, he said it had often occurred to him that it was the great Creator who had caused bridge to be discovered; he said God gave us bridge so that good Christians could give up playing poker. Wasn't that deep?"

Mr. Blake ventured some reply such as courtesy and conscience could agree upon. "I really never gave the matter much thought," he concluded.

"Oh, dear! There we are at half speed again! I

know I'll be too late. Yes, even some of his sermons were very deep. He had a beautiful poetic mind; and he gave everything such a lovely turn. I shall never forget his last sermon. It was beautiful; he was preaching on the text: 'Wash me whiter than snow'—the church was so hot, but you could just see the snow. And his divisions were beautiful. I can tell them yet. His first point was that we should all be pure and white like the snow. Then the second one, he said, grew out of the first, that if we were pure and clean like the snow, we would not be impure or unclean. And the last point was a very solemn one. He said that if we were not pure and white like the snow, by and by we would go down where there was no more snow. That was a beautiful thought, wasn't it? I thought it was such a lovely ending."

"I never heard a sermon just like that," remarked Mr. Blake, his mind reverting to St. Cuthbert's.

"Neither did I," went on the worshipper, "and I told him so the next night when we met at Mrs. Bronson's for a little farewell game. He took hold of his cross again and he said: 'We must deal faithfully, Mrs. Drake'—and he was just starting to deal as he spoke. But he never smiled, except that sad, sweet smile that he always wore—except when he lost. And he told us that after that service he

found the curate weeping in the vestry. But the curate fairly worships Mr. Bartlett. It was Mr. Bartlett who first taught him bridge, I think. Do you play bridge, Mr. Blake?"

"No, I never learned the game."

"Oh, I forgot; you're a Presbyterian, you said. It's pretty much a church game, I fancy. Excuse my rudeness, but why don't you wear a cross, Mr. Blake?"

"What?" said Mr. Blake abruptly, "why don't I what?"

"Isn't that dreadful? The engines are scarcely moving; I know we won't get in till five, and the bridge begins at three. There is nothing but disappointments in this world. Oh, yes, why don't you wear a cross? Not so much for the ornament, of course. I got this one at Tiffany's and it cost me ten pounds. But, as Mr. Bartlett said, the cross stands for sacrifice, so I don't begrudge it. I think, in this world of sin and sorrow every one should wear a cross. We're going a little faster now, don't you think?"

"Yes, madam, I think we are—and I do wear a cross—if you have not forgotten your question."

"Oh, you do. I am so glad. Where? I suppose you've changed your clothes. But I never noticed it before."

"No, I don't think you have seen it."

"Oh, I see, lots of men carry them under their vests. But I think we should let the world see it. Do you carry yours next your heart?"

"No, madam, deeper still," said Mr. Blake.

XXVIII

The HEATHERY HILLS

THE anchor had been cast, and the good ship, panting, lay at rest. The bugle note had followed the departing tender with wistful strains of "Auld Lang Syne," and the emancipated passengers were pouring out upon old England's hospitable soil. The happy crowd, catching already the contagion of English jollity, swayed about the landing stage, then flowed in separate streams into the Customs pen; for this is the first tug of the tether, just when all who have escaped the sea think they are safe at last. Out through the fingers of the stern inspectors flowed the crowd in still thinner streams, till all this community of the deep is scattered to the winds.

Swift-hurrying, they go their separate ways, and the happy little bubble has burst and vanished, as its successors, now forming on the bosom of the deep, will burst and vanish too. What friendships, what ardent loves, what molten vows, ocean born, have begun to languish on the wharf at Liverpool, like sunfish separated from their native wave!

Michael Blake hailed a hansom and drove to the North-Western. As he passed through the turbid streets, dense loneliness settled about him like a fog. This was old England, this the land which exiles across the sea in their fondness call the "old country."

But he could not free himself from the thought that, when he left it, youth's sun was burning bright; and now more than the early afternoon was gone.

"The evening too will pass, as the afternoon has passed," he said to himself, "only more quickly." And he glanced at the descending sun, God's metaphor of warning, the recurring epitome of life. His lips moved to speak a text, the native instinct strong therefor. They had meant to say "the night cometh"; but some one interfered and he said to himself: "The night is far spent—the day is at hand," for, after all, the setting sun has morning in its heart.

He dismissed the cab, and entering the hotel, made some enquiry about the trains for the North. He could not start North before midnight. The evening was fine, and he walked out. St. George's Hall arrested him with its elaborate grandeur. What beauty, what chastity, what becoming signs of civic wealth! When he came to its massive steps he cast his eyes upon them, and behold, they were dripping

with poverty! The victims of want in mid-career were there, and drooping age, unequally yoked with poverty, and frowzy women with ribald face; and chief among them all, little children, some bleareyed, some pallid with want, some with the legacy of sores—for they had been shapen in iniquity.

But all alike—and herein was the anguish of it—all alike were bent on play, and persisted pitifully in the cruel farce. The little bare feet pattered up and down the steps—but the steps were stone.

Michael Blake thought of his adopted home across the sea and its green fields and tree-graced meadows. Then he thought of the far Western plains, vast beyond human fancy, waiting and calling for the tired feet of all who spend weary lives in the old land, playing on stone steps, while wealth and grandeur smile above them. In a few minutes he turned away, for the folk of his country are not accustomed to the sight of hungry children; and a woman under drink is something that many of their eldest have never seen at all.

The sound of martial music, and the voice of cheering thousands, fell upon his ear. He moved towards it. Soon the surging procession broke upon him. "Who are these?" he asked, "these fellows in Khaki?" They had their rifles in their hands, and some were slightly lame, and some had the signs of

wounds—and all had the rich stain of battle on them. "Art thou only a stranger?" he is asked in turn, "and knowest not the things that are come to pass? These are they who have come out of Paardeburg, homeward bound by way of the ancestral home, and the tide of British love and gratitude wafts them on their course."

He is soon caught in the swelling throng, his own head bare, his own voice blending in the Imperial hosannah. He catches a familiar face among the soldiers; he hears the strain of the "Maple Leaf" mingling with the mighty bass of the Mother Anthem. He beholds the Union Jack, enriched with the Canadian emblem. Gazing on the battered few, he sees the survivors of the battle, and he knows that the unreturning feet rest in the soil they have won to freedom; Canadian lads were these who have insisted with dying lips that Britains never shall be slaves. His adopted land has given of its choicest blood to swell the sacred tide that for centuries hath laved the shores of liberty.

All this surges in upon him, and the savage joy of empire fills his heart. His loneliness has fled, and he feels that beyond the ocean he is at home, the old home, with its ever open gate for its far-flung children. The mighty roar becomes the gentle whisper of Britain's lips, bidding him draw closer to the im-

perial fireside and warm himself at its imperishable flame.

He follows them for a time, then turns and slowly wends his way back to the hotel. As he walks on, the shouting and the tumult die, the banners gleam no more, and he is left alone with the empire of his heart, and with other worlds to conquer. We need no swift-flying transport to bear us to life's greatest battle-fields.

A little waif, a boy of ten, pinched and ragged, was gazing in a window as Mr. Blake passed along. A question from the man, a quick and pathetic answer from the boy—and they went in together. Then the man came out alone, and the fervent joy of an hour ago was gone, but a deeper gladness had taken the room it left behind. It is still there—a life-tenant—for its lease cannot be broken till memory dies.

When he re-entered the hotel, the clerk recognized him and said:

"Your train goes in an hour, sir. You are going up to Scotland, I think you said."

Scotland! The word inflamed him; and he hurried to his room to prepare for departure.

The guard's sharp whistle sounded, and the train, with British promptness, flew out of the Lime Street station, one heart at least strangely thrilled, one face steadfastly set towards Scotland's waiting hills.

He was alone in the compartment, and the long night seemed only like a watch thereof. He was alone, yet not alone—for Memory sat beside him, and Conscience, and Hope. No, he was not alone; for there wrestled a Man with him till the breaking of the day. And still the train flew on, as though it knew; on it flew, as though the unseen Wrestler himself had his hand upon the engine's throat.

The sun was rising when he left the train. The train flew on, uncaring, for trains know not that they are carriers unto destiny.

Michael Blake looked long at the rising sun—it was the same. Then his eyes caressed the surrounding hills, playfellows of bygone years—they had not changed. The flowers still were there, the grass had never withered; the heather, too, in unfading purity.

And the trees, the old mighty elms, these were still the same—the foliage of a larger life they had, but the selfsame branches held out their kindly hands as in the long ago. Still upturned were their reverent heads, still seeking God—and the baptism of the morning was upon them, attested by the morning light.

He turned towards one of the familiar hills and began the old boyhood climb.

Midway, he came to a spring, and a great thirst clutched his heart. It was life's long, quenchless

thirst, crying out again for the children's portion. His face is close to its crystal water, his lips burning with desire. Another's face moves upward to greet his own—but it is not the same—and memory swiftly paints another till he actually sees it, the ardent face of youth. And beside it is a maiden's face—for they had often stooped together—a maiden's face, laughing for very love. But they vanish and he sees again his own, worn and wrinkle-signed—and alone.

Yet the spring still is there, unwrinkled and unworn, and his fevered lips drink deeply. How sweet, how delicious, and how wondrous cool! It is still the same as when rosy lips of love sipped from its surface long ago. He rises and turns from the hallowed spot; but the flood-gates of memory are unloosed, and his heart melts within him. The tears are flowing fast and the old luxury, because the old innocence, of childhood, seems to bathe his broken heart.

"Oh, God," he cries aloud, "hast Thou no fountain for the soul, no living springs farther up the hill?" and as he cried, he glanced again into the limpid spring. And lo! that gentle face was there again, love's laughter still upon its lips, and a great hope looking out from grave and tender eyes.

Then farther up the hill he climbed, the quick step of boyhood coming back—and soon he stood upon

its brow. He threw himself upon the grass and cast his eyes over all the unforgotten valley. It was slumbering still, for the sun is over early in Scottish latitudes, and he quickly searched the hillside that confronted him. Behind a sheltering bush he lay, peering far beyond.

All the valley is forgotten now—for, across the ravine beneath him, he sees a cottage. The same, the very same it is, save that the thatch has been renewed! A humble shepherd's cottage, only a but and a ben, built long ago by thrifty hands—but he first learned to worship there.

Yet is it still the same? He knows not—but he knows the risk of passing years. Unchanged the cottage stands, and the same gate hangs half open as in the far back yesterday. Yet it is the spirit alone that giveth life, and of this he may not know. He looks at his watch—it is near six o'clock, and he had seen a man walk sleepily to the byre from a distant house. He waits and watches, while a strange fever burns his heart, unknown to youthful passion. His lips are parched, though the water from the spring is scarce dry upon them yet.

Still gazing, he sees no sign of life about the house. He thinks, yet knows not why, of Mary and the empty tomb. Hope is sinking fast, when of a sudden a timid wreath of smoke flows slowly from the

chimney, and Michael Blake's hand reaches swiftly towards his heart. "Be still, be still," he murmurs, "who knows that it is for thee?" but his eyes follow it greedily, for it is to him a soul-signal from afar, God's altar smoke, and he knows now that the house is not a sepulchre.

"Now I shall go and knock," he said to himself; but a new thought possessed him, and he bowed again behind the slender furze, his eyes still fixed upon the house.

They were but minutes that he waited, but they came disguised as hours—for God can compel us to rehearse eternity. He must have felt it coming, for his eyes have forsaken all else, and are fixed upon the cottage door. Yes, it moved, it surely moved; and the strong man's eyes are numb. They rally and renew the vigil. Yes, it moves, wider still—and the flutter of a dress is seen. His heart leaps wildly, and his eyes fly at the face that follows. It is too far to see clearly—but he soon must know!

A comely form emerges from the door, and the face looks up at the morning sun. The woman walks out and on, lithe grace in every movement. Then the valley swims before him—for it is, it is, the woman he had loved. He knows the dainty step, the erect carriage, the shapely frame. Nearer still she comes, skirting the base of the hill he had

climbed, still often looking towards the sun, pausing now and then to pluck a flower by the way. Where can she be going?

No bonnet binds her waving hair, and now he can catch the light of the morning sun upon it. Streaks of gray, here and there, can be seen, but they are few; the breeze rallies the loose-flowing strands and they make merry and are glad together. He can see the pure bosom, lightly robed, that swells with buoyant life. She is nearer to him now, and the face swims in upon him across the chasm of long silent years, the same pure face, still bright with tender love. She is now beside the spring—for thither was she bent—and the overflowing pail is laid down beside her.

She too glances into the bosom of the water and he wonders if memory guides the wistful gaze. Does she too see another face preserved against the years in the pure keeping of the spring? He knows not—but he thinks, yes, he is sure he saw the movement of the lips, and her face is again upturned—but its thought is far beyond the sun. He uncovers his head and joins the holy quest.

She has returned to the cottage and the door is closed; but Michael Blake has never moved. Now he steps out from behind his shelter and starts towards the house. Then he stops, turns back and begins to descend the hill by the same course as had

led him up. Yet once more he turns and gazes long at the dwelling-place, starts towards it, stops again.

"Not now," he said to himself, "I cannot—it is too light."

And he walked back to the hamlet; he was waiting for the tender dark.

XXIX

"AND ALL BUT HE DEPARTED"

THE little inn seemed to have no guests except the traveller from beyond the sea. But no such tavern is ever long deserted, for the Scotch nature, while it may be dry, is ever loyal. Michael Blake had read but a line or two of the *Edinburgh Scotsman*, ten days of age, when a man walked solemnly in and sat down beside him. His face, his breath, and especially his nose, bore eloquent testimony to the aforesaid loyalty of his nature. He bade Mr. Blake a cheerful good-morning, glancing at the same time towards the counter beneath which the liquid necessities were stored.

"It's a fine mornin'," he began.

"A beautiful day," assented Mr. Blake.

"Ye'll no' live aboot these pairts?" inquired the other.

"No, I live far from here."

"Ye'll mebbe be frae Ameriky?" ventured his interrogator, closing in upon him.

"Yes, I live in Canada," was the response.

"Canady," said the man. "We're gey prood o' Canady the noo. I ken't a man once wha went to

Canady. I had a drink wi' him afore he went," he continued, his eye lighting with the dewy memory, "ye'll likely ken him? Oliver was his name, Wattie Oliver, a bow-leggit wee body."

"I cannot say I ever met with him," replied Mr. Blake. "Canada is larger than you think over here."

"Mebbe so," said the friendly stranger, "mair nor likely he's deid noo; one o' thae red Indians micht hae killed him, like eneuch."

"Yes, or perhaps a bear," Mr. Blake replied gravely.

There was a pause. A bell was ringing, its notes floating in clear and sweet upon them.

"What bell is that?" inquired Mr. Blake.

"That's oor bell i' the parish kirk; there's no ither ane."

"What is it ringing for? To-day is Thursday." asked Mr. Blake.

"Aye," responded the other, "this is the fast day. Sabbath's the sacrament, ye ken, and they're maist awfu' strict aboot the fast day. They wadna work that day, nae mair than on the Sabbath. They willna even whustle. Ae mornin' I met Davie Drewry, an' 'twas the fast day. Noo, of course, it was juist an or'nary day in Dr. Cameron's parish across the burn —the burn divides the twa, ye ken. Weel, Davie was a lad for whustlin'—he cudna leeve withoot whustlin'—but he was gey religious too. Weel, I

met Davie that mornin', walkin' awfu' fast, maist rinnin'—an' his face was red.

"'Whaur micht ye be gaun, Davie?' says I, 'naebody ailin'?

"'Na, na,' says Davie, 'but it's the fast day, an' I canna stand it ony longer. I'm gaun ower the burn to hae a whustle.' Wasna that fair redeek'lus!"

"Quite ingenious," answered Mr. Blake. "You go to that church, I suppose?"

"Na, I dinna. I quit it when they brocht the kist o' whustles intill't. I wadna stand it. There's nae real Presbyterians there, forbye me an' Jock Campbell—an' I'm sair feart aboot Jock. I doot he's weakenin'. They tell me he speaks to the minister on the street, an' if that's true, there's no' muckle o' the auld religion aboot Jock, I'm fearin'."

"Do you not speak to the minister?"

"Na, I dinna. There's naething o' the hypocrite aboot me, I'm tellin' ye. I settled the minister fine the last word I spoke to him. He came to see me; an' he thocht he could wheedle me aboot the organ i' the hoose o' God.

"'Div ye no' ken,' he says to me, 'aboot Dauvit, the sweet singer o' Israel—how he played a' kinds o' instruments i' the Lord's hoose?' He thocht he had me. But I gied him as guid as he brocht. What think ye I answered him?"

"I really have no idea," said Mr. Blake. "What was it?"

"'Div ye think,' says I, lookin' fair at him, 'div ye think I tak Dauvit for a paittern?'—and it did for him. 'I'll hae to be gaein',' says he, 'I hae a funeral.' 'Aye,' says I, 'ye'd better hae a funeral'—an' we haena spoken to ane anither since."

"That's a pity," said Mr. Blake, "it seems too bad that the soul's interests should suffer because of a matter of that kind. Of course," he continued, "I don't say that a man may not be religious because he doesn't go to church. Men may scorn the bridge and still get across the river, but they would have got along better by the bridge."

"I dinna ken aboot the brig," said the other, "that isna to the point,"—for he was not of a metaphorical turn of mind—"but I've nae doot aboot bein' religious. A man in my walk o' life, in my business, ye ken, canna weel help bein' religious. He's the same as the Apostle Paul."

"What?" said Mr. Blake, "are you a tent-maker?"

"Na, na, certainly not; there's nane o' them nowadays. A man in my callin' doesna *do* the same as Paul, but he can *say* the same, ye see. I can say wi' Paul: 'Death to me is great gain'—I'm an undertaker, ye ken."

"An undertaker," exclaimed his listener, unconsciously pushing back his chair, shocked at the gruesome humour. Besides, the man was looking at him with something like a professional eye, as if making an estimate of time, and space.

"Aye," responded he of the apostolic claim, "I'm an undertaker—but times is dull. I was an undertaker ten year in Lockerby, but I left there lang syne. I had ae fine customer, the bailie; he had eleven o' a family. But I lost his trade. The bailie was sick—an' my laddie, wee Sandy, was aye plaguin' me for a sled. I tell't him I'd get him ane when I had mair siller. Weel, wee Sandy was aye rinnin' ower to the hoose an' askin' aboot the bailie. 'Twas nat'ral eneuch; the laddie meant nae harm, but he wanted his sled afore the snaw was gone. Ony way, they tuk offense."

"Did he get his sled?" asked Mr. Blake mechanically, staring at the man.

"Na, poor wee Sandy never got his sled. I had juist ae ither customer ye micht ca' guid. He was deein' o' consumption, an' I took guid care o' Sandy's sympathy. There was no askin' aboot him, mind ye. But there was a mean man i' the business, wha was never meant to be an undertaker. His name was Creighton, Tom Creighton, an' what dae ye think Tom did, to get his trade?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Blake, rising to depart.

"Weel, I'll tell ye. Twa days afore he died, Tom Creighton tuk him oot for a drive—he was awfu' fair to his face an' he got around him; tell't him at the gate that he hoped to gie him anither drive later on. Of course, he got his trade—he had to gie him his trade after that. But I wadna stoop to sic like tricks for nae man's trade. So I left Lockerby an' came here—I'm the only yin here."

Mr. Blake was glad to escape his garrulous acquaintance, and had heard enough of his sombre annals. He walked out, and wandered far—o'er moor and fen, o'er hill and valley, by many an unforgotten path, he wandered—past his boyhood's school, where he heard again the laughing shout that seemed scarcely to have died away from lips now silent long.

He loitered again by the babbling stream which had been the fishing-ground of boyhood, and lay once more on mossy beds, and bathed his face in the same friendly tide. He gazed far up into the leafy trees and saw the very nooks where boyhood's form had rested; again he saw the sun gleam on the happy heads of those who gambolled far beneath.

He drank his fill of the long yesterday, thirsty still. No familiar face, no voice of long ago, had he seen or heard; and he tasted that unreasoning pain which comes to the man who knows, and is wounded by the

truth, that his native heath is reconciled to his exile, careless of his loneliness, indifferent to bid it cease.

When he returned to the hospitable inn, he was as one seeking rest, and finding none. He sat, reflective, while memory bathed the soul of love with tears. Presently the sound of voices floated out from an adjoining room. He listened eagerly, for one was evidently the voice of a returned wanderer like himself. The other was that of a man who had never wandered from his native spot. The home-keeper's tongue had still its mother-Scotch, but his companion had been cured.

"I know I shouldn't do it, Gavin," he heard the latter say, "I'm really a teetotaler in Australia. Used to take a drop or two before I emigrated; but I'm an elder now, and I haven't tasted for years. However this is a special occasion."

Mr. Blake moved his chair to where he could catch a glimpse of the men. They were advanced in years, both about sixty-five, and their heads were gray. Their dress betokened plainness of nature, though that of the Australian might indicate prosperity. Both would seem uncultured, except in heart.

"A speecial occasion!" cried the one addressed as Gavin, "a speecial occasion! I should say it is—verra speecial! It's twa an' forty years sin we claspit

ane anither's hand—man, Andra', friendship's sweet, an' God's guid! It wad be fair sinfu' no' ta tak a drop at sic a time as this. The minister himsel' wad taste, gin an auld schulemate came back after forty year. Sae wad the Apostle Paul—the stomach's sake was naethin' compared wi' this. What'll ye hae, Andra?"

"Let this be mine, Gavin," answered Andrew, reaching for his pocketbook. When it appeared, it was fat and full, and Gavin stole a wistful glance; for, in Scotland, colonial pocketbooks are proverbially plump. "What shall it be?" he added.

"Whatever ye say, Andra," answered Gavin. He glanced again at the disappearing purse and heaved a little sigh. Patriotism is not good for pocketbooks, thought Gavin.

"Well," said his old schoolmate, holding a sovereign between his thumb and finger as fondly as though he had lived in Scotland all his life; "well," said he, "I say champagne—here, waiter!"

But Gavin interrupted: "Na, na, Andra, dinna get champagne. I took it ance when the young Duke came o' age, an' I cudna hae tell't I had onything, half an hour later. I dinna care for ony o' thae *aeryated* waters. Forbye, it's awfu' dear, an' we can hae far mair o' the ither," he concluded, smiling tenderly at Andrew.

"The other" was produced; and it justified the trust reposed in it. Well it knew its duty, and well it played its part; for it burnished memory bright, stirred emotion from its hiding place, and even led tears out by long deserted paths.

The lonely man in the outer room watched, and envied, and secretly absolved his brother elder—the latter was giving abundant proof of his freedom from all narrow bigotry. Like himself, his old prowess had come back. He was confidential now:

"She wouldn't have me, Gavin. I told her I was rich, and that I loved her ever since I left. But she wouldn't listen to me. Then I told her I owned ten thousand sheep, and that I dreamed about her every night. But it never moved her. I told her I had twenty thousand pounds in the bank, and her picture next my heart besides—but she wouldn't. She said she was promised to another. Did you ever hear of Janet Strachan caring for any one else?"

"Na," said Gavin, absently, "she'll no' hae nocht to dae wi' onybody in the way o' love—hae anither, Andra. Dinna droon the miller. Wad we no' hae been fules to tak champagne? It wad hae been a' dune by noo."

Then Gavin stood erect, motioning to Andrew to do the same. Andrew rose; one on each side of the little table they stood, a glass in the left hand of

each, for they were about to enact one of Scotland's great scenes. Far scattered are her sons, but they have the homing heart, and unforgetting cronies wait to welcome them.

Gavin's hand is outstretched and Andrew's goes forth to meet it. They clasp, the same hands as fought and played together in the golden boyhood days.

"Andra," said Gavin, "I'll repeat to you the twa best lines o' rhyme i' the language: An' div ye ken hoo true they are?

"'We twa hae paidl't i' the burn
Frae mornin' sun till dine'

—mind ye that, we twa hae paidl't i' the burn—an' it's flowin' yet, an' God's gey guid—here's to ye, Andra," and the men drank together, the elder and the unordained, but the past was sacred to them both —and childhood's tears came back to make that past complete.

About an hour later, Andrew and Gavin passed out through the adjoining room. They came upon Mr. Blake, whereupon they immediately sat down, neither being in the mood for walking far. Both greeted him with warmth, and invited him to try for himself the process which they had undergone in the adjoining room. Mr. Blake gratefully declined.

"Ye'll have travelled far?" said Gavin, avoiding the direct interrogative.

"A long way, indeed," said Mr. Blake.

"Come from America, stranger?" said Andrew.

"Yes, from Canada."

"Shake, I'm a fellow colonial—I'm from Australia—delightful this, to come back to the old homestead and meet a brother you never saw before."

"Maist wonderfu', is't no'?" interjected Gavin—then the responsibilities of a host began to weigh upon him, and he urged Mr. Blake to reconsider his decision about the process; but Mr. Blake was firm.

"I ken't fine there was somebody frae Ameriky i' these pairts," said Gavin. "Brownie Telfer tell't me there was a saxpence i' the plate last Sabbath day. It'll be yir ain?"

"No, I'm afraid I cannot claim it," said Mr. Blake. "I only landed yesterday."

"Ye'll be rinnin' aboot at a graun rate," said Gavin, trying a new vein; "came ower a sicht seein', did ye?"

"No," said Mr. Blake, "not particularly."

"Took a little run over on business, I suppose?" amended the Australian.

"Yes," assented Mr. Blake.

"You said you were born in Scotland; have you

any old friends still about? Kind of lonely business if you haven't," continued Andrew.

"I really cannot say I have," said Mr. Blake, moving towards the door. "I'm a fish out of its accustomed waters, even in its old hunting-ground, if you will excuse mixed metaphors. Good-evening to you both; I'm glad to have met with you."

"Good-evening to you," cried the men.

The Canadian was gone, but the two old cronies sat smoking; and the twilight, that great gleaner of the past, crept about them, bringing tender memories that mistrusted the garish day. In the very midst of them, Gavin said:

"What did the cratur mean when he spoke aboot 'mïxed metaphors'? I never heard tell o' them before."

"I'm not very sure," answered Andrew, cautiously; "he must have meant something."

"'Mixed metaphors,'" mused Gavin, "an' the body wadna tak onythin'; it'll be somethin' they tak in Ameriky—I'll ask Ronnie."

Now Ronnie was the bartender!

XXX

LOVE'S VICTORY OVER SIN

THE curtain of the night had fallen—and human souls were on their trial; for human life is then behind the scenes, and the candour of its purity or shame comes with the shelter of the falling night. In their noblest acts, and in their basest deeds, men are aided by the impartial dark. Both alike she screens, though with fickle folds, retreating when she hears the first footfall of the dawn; then is every man's work made manifest of what sort it is—and the great judgment day shall be but relentless light.

The landscape no longer glimmered on the sight when Michael Blake set out from the little inn, his heart burning with fear. And hope heaped fuel on the flame, for fear would die if it were not for hope. He walked on beneath the stately elms, their far-spread branches whispering as he passed, for they knew well his step, and wondered that it hurried so. He paused at the spring and drank again, but his thirst was still unquenched.

He looked about him at the holy night; and surging shame flooded neck and face with crimson. For it had been thus and there, amid the sanctities of the

night, and by their trysting-place, that the soul's great wound was made, the blood oozing ever since, oozing still. Memory, ermine-robed, half enchantress and half avenger, turned her face full on his as he sat by the spring; but he turned his own away and started on, ever on.

"Oh, my God! Give me a chance," he cried, "give me a chance," and the darkness answered not, but the whispering trees seemed to have the woman-voice.

He sees the light now; it is the harbour light, and Michael Blake presses swiftly on, his heart upbraiding the laggard feet.

He stands now before the door, but that same heart, strangely wavering, refuses to go in. The hour has struck for Michael Blake, the hour for which his soul has waited long; but strange forces seek to hold him back. The chiefest of these is fear; he feels he is hurrying his judgment day, and when God would punish men, thinks he, He endows them with deep and burning love—for otherwise He cannot speak to them in the eternal tongue. The trembling man turns as if to go back.

"It is too light," he murmured, "still too light," for the memory of another night has arisen upon him with judgment in its wings.

As he moves noiselessly from the door-step, he

pauses by the window. It is partly open, for the night is mild. A woman's figure moves before it, so close that he could almost touch—and his arms go out unbidden, God's retrievers, though they knew it not. He controls himself, and steps back a pace, for she has passed to the other side of the room. Beside an old chest of drawers she kneels, and his heart burns with eager passion as he beholds the beauty of her face. Time, and sorrow, and God, have worked together. Unto them all she hath submitted, and they have held to their holy task till the beauty of peace rewards their secret toil.

She is lifting something from the drawer and the light falls upon it. Another, and still another, she takes up in her gentle hands, smiling down on them the while—they are a child's outgrown possessions, bits of clothing some, and some, broken toys, such as mothers take into their immortal keeping when children have spurned them from their own.

And what is that, shining bright, held longer than the others, still smiling down upon it, her bosom heaving more heavily than before? He knows, he knows—it is a little brooch, so little, but of gold, given her long ago in the first glad sacrifice of love. She kisses it, and the tears fall fast upon it, the lovely face suffused. It is tenderly restored to its hiding-place, and the graceful form is full-bowed now.

He can see the white clasped hands, and the movement of the pure lips he also sees. The words he cannot catch—for God is close, and the voice is low. But the fragrance of prayer steals out to him, and the Interpreter, once called the Man of Sorrows, tells him for whom she prays. "Make me worthy, oh, God," he cries, his heart melted within him. Again he turns to the door, and this time he falters not, but knocks. In a moment it is opened.

"Guid evenin' sir," said the woman's voice. "I canna see ye for the dark; is it some one I ken?" for wayfarers often sought guidance at her door.

"No, I fear you do not know me," the man responded, "and I crave your pardon for thus disturbing you. I have travelled far."

"Will ye come in? Or is there something I can do?"

"No, thank you," said the man; "I have travelled far and am thirsty. I seek but a draught of water, and I shall go on my way."

"I'll sune gie ye that," replied the woman's cheery voice, "but what's here is mebbe raither warm. Bide ye here till I rin doon to the spring."

The sweet face gleamed in the candle-light as she turned within, picking up a light plaid shawl, so strong is habit, which she threw across her shoulders. The tall gracious form was gone a moment, one dark-

some moment, returning instantly, a pitcher in her hand. Down the steps she tripped, and out into the night, her white gown mingling with the darkness.

Michael Blake stealthily followed her, his heart in wild tumult again. Her pace was swift and he found it difficult to keep the path. But again he saw the flutter of white before him, and he knew that it was Janet, none other, the same whom he had held so close in other days. He ran a little, panting as he ran, his thirst a torment now—for the chase was of the soul. He is not far from her.

"Janet," he cried.

She stopped and stood still, as a deer stops when it hears the hunter's voice.

He was closer now, and again he cried: "Janet, oh, Janet, wait for me."

Her pitcher was thrown upon the sward and she came back a little way, eye and heart and bosom calling to each other through the storm.

"Wha's callin' me?" she cried, her voice bleating like a lamb's.

"Oh, Janet, you know who's calling you—I have called you long," and holy passion burned in the voice that spoke, leaped from the face that came closer, still closer, to her own.

The white figure swayed in the darkness. Then the night glowed about her like the noon, and the

strong arms held her close, and time and sorrow and God all gave her up ungrudgingly to the bliss they had planned together; for in secret had they bedecked her as a bride adorned for her husband.

* * * * * *

It was long after, how long may not be told, for God would let no angel mark the time; but the dark still was brooding, and the trees whispering still, when he said: "To-morrow, Janet—all the years have made us ready—yet not to-morrow, for it is to-day—to-day, please God."

She came closer, closer to him still, for hers had been an unsheltered life, and the warmth was strangely sweet.

"Let us go to the spring, dear heart. Let us be children again." Together they went on, these pilgrims of the night. While they were going the day began to break. "The night is far spent," he heard her whisper joyously.

They knelt together, nor thought it strange—for the youthful heart of love was theirs again; and they drank from the unsleeping spring, smiling back at them as their lips kissed its face together. The same spring, the same lips—but purer both!

And as they stooped, two faces from the bosom of the water rose again to meet them. Each of the lovers saw but one, for each saw the other's face.

And lo! each was the face of happy youth, the light of love within its eyes, unchanged by years, except for a graver innocence. But each saw the face that had looked up and smiled in the years so long gone by.

The scientist and the philosopher and the deeply-learned in nature's laws will read of this with generous disdain; but they forget that this spring had its charter right from God, and was fed from other fountains farther up the hill. Besides, optics is God's own science—and this was the morning light.

XXXI

LOVE'S TRIUMPH OVER ALL

ALL things were in readiness, and the people of St. Cuthbert's were awaiting the Sabbath day with eager souls. For it was the Sabbath of the sacrament, dispensed but twice a year, according to the custom of their fathers. I myself looked forward to this communion with a kindling heart, for I knew its healing grace; and this was the first dispensation since the shadow of that ordination day had fallen on our church's life.

The morning came, radiant in its robe of early spring, and we knew that a great multitude would throng St. Cuthbert's. For the aged and long imprisoned, denied the regular services of the kirk, would yet venture forth to show the Lord's death once again, some to drink that cup no more till they should drink it new in their Father's kingdom.

Down the aisle would they come, leaning heavily upon the staff—but they knew their accustomed places, the places which were so soon to know them no more forever; when the service was over, they would retrace their steps to the door of the now deserted church, and backward turning, would cast one

longing, lingering look behind, then set their peaceful faces towards their home, the long rough journey near its end at last.

The elders, including the four recently added to their number, met as usual, for preparatory prayer. More than ordinary tenderness seemed to mark their petitions, for their hearts were with the absent; and the senior elder thrilled us when he prayed for "him whom we had hoped to begin his ministry this day, and for Thy servant who was wont in the days that are past to serve with us before Thine altar."

As I walked into the pulpit, I caught a glimpse of Margaret's face, and never have I seen sweeter peace than rested upon it. Her eyes reposed on the snowy cloth that hid the emblems of a greater sacrifice, and she knew, as few could know, the deep sacramental joy.

But hardly had my heart warmed at sight of her before sorrow chilled its ardour; for right opposite Margaret's pew was that of Michael Blake—and its emptiness smote my heart with pain. Not there, nor in his rightful place among the elders, was my old-time friend. Where, I could not help but wonder, where to-day is the unhappy man who has cast his ministry behind him? And bitter memories of varied verdicts flitted before me as I went up the pulpit steps.

We had begun the psalm, and were in the midst of the line—never can I forget it:

> "As far as east is distant from
> The west, so far hath he"

when I noticed the volume of song become gradually less, and a nameless sense of discomfort possessed me.

I looked up, and could scarce restrain a cry.

For I saw the face of Michael Blake—and he was walking down the aisle—— And that other, who is that? For beside him is a woman's comely form, her sweet face lowly bent as though it would be hidden, the light of purity mingling with the conscious flame.

Upon Mr. Blake's face is the humble chastened look of one whom God has touched—in the hollow of his thigh, mayhap—and the limp may be seen of all men to the last. But pride is there too, the solemn pride of one who has wrestled and prevailed, to go henceforth forever halting, but forever heavenward.

Down the aisle, the same aisle by which he had departed from us, they walked together, while wondering faces drank in the meaning of it all, joy breaking forth upon them like the sun when darkening clouds have gone.

He leads her to his old-time pew, and she takes the place that is henceforth to be her own. The singing

has stopped, save those silent strains with which God is well pleased, the same as angels echo round the throne.

It was hard for me to proceed with the service, for I knew that God Himself had spoken. The sacred bush was in flame before us as in the olden time, and the place whereon we stood was holy ground. The portion I had chosen for the reading was from 1 Corinthians, the apostle's great eulogy on love; and my voice faltered as I read some of its wondrous words.

Before I had finished it, my resolve was taken. I came down from the pulpit and stood before it, the elders all about me.

"Let us have our unbroken number," I began; "the kirk session is constituted, and I call upon such as have been chosen to serve within it, to come forward and assume the holy office. After this, the sacrament of forgiving love will be dispensed."

I paused—and no one of all the multitude seemed to breathe. But a moment passed, and then a sound broke the stillness. It was the sound of moving feet, and the elder-elect arose and came slowly forward, his head bowed as he came.

"Kneel down, Angus," I said, softly. He kneeled, and I had almost begun, my hands outstretched above his head. He raised his face to mine, lowered

to meet it. A moment told me what he wished to say.

"Stand up," I whispered.

When he had risen, I said aloud: "Angus Strachan, ordained already, I give you the right hand of fellowship into the eldership of St. Cuthbert's church. The Lord bless thee and keep thee; the Lord make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift the light of His countenance upon thee and give thee peace."

Again I raised my voice as I faced the worshippers.

"I extend yet another invitation in my Master's name. I call upon any who may be among us, once serving in the eldership of this church, to come forward and aid us to dispense the pledges of forgiving love to other sinful men."

I waited, but there was no response. One sat with bowed head, his hand held in the gentle keeping of another's. The moments passed, but still silence reigned.

"Come awa', man,"—it was Ronald McGregor's trembling voice from among the elders—"come awa'; it's the wounded hand that beckons ye—we're a' here o' the Saviour's grace alane."

Michael Blake moved slightly, but his head was lower bowed.

"Gang forrit, Michael, gang forrit to the table.

He's been gey guid to us baith—an' oor Angus wants ye," whispered the woman beside him.

Then he came; and, as he walked to the table, the meaning of God's pardoning love seemed borne in upon us as it had never been before.

He had hardly taken his seat beside us when we heard a faint rustling sound, some one moving. I turned my head, and saw Margaret, her face lovely through its tears, slip into the empty place and take in her own the hand that had been just released. Burning hot it was, but she held it tight—and Janet took her into her heart forever.

Then the sacred emblems were poured and broken by our sinful hands, redeemed by love alone. The elders bore them forth to the waiting souls, and when Angus came to his mother's place, great grace was upon us all. He had bent one moment, before she took the chalice in her trembling hand. One word was spoken, only one, and what it was no one heard —nor Margaret, nor any one but God.

* * * * * *

Because of more abounding grace, and because of that alone, I cherish the trembling hope that I shall yet hear the new and holy song in the blessed home-land yonder. Yonder, I say, for on clear days I have seen the dim outline of the hills beyond the river; and sometimes in the night I have caught the glow

of an unsetting sun. Only for a moment, it is true —but it was enough. My sight is failing, they tell me, and the light is not so clear as in the early afternoon, but these yonder things are seen the clearest in the failing light, and by eyes that are past their best.

Wherefore, as I set out to say, I think I shall be welcomed thither by the pilgrims' friend, and hear that song of the redeemed.

But not till then can I expect to ever hear again such melody as poured from our hearts that morning in St. Cuthbert's. As for myself, I could scarcely sing; I was so torn 'twixt joy and sorrow. Sorrow for what? For all my stubborn wilfullness, that had stood so long between loving hearts—but I did it for the best; and God will forgive me, who knows a father's tender love.

Therefore my lips were almost dumb, but my heart joined in the swelling praise that rolled about St. Cuthbert's like a flood. And I heard one voice clear and sweet among all the rest; it came from the pew where sat our Margaret, but it was not Margaret's voice:

> "Long hath the night of sorrow reigned
> The dawn shall bring us light—"

Thus reads our noble paraphrase—and thus reads the

providence of God. This it was we sang that day; and this all broken hearts shall one day sing, when life's long twilight breaks.

After the congregation had dispersed, I saw Margaret lead her mother to the pew. It was beautiful, my wife's gentle grace to the timid stranger, for Margaret received of her mother whatever of that gift she hath—and I have always said her mother's is the rarer of the two. I heard her bid her new-found friend to the manse, and I echoed the mandate to the man beside me, his head still bowed in prayer.

The elders retired in a body to the vestry, there to be dismissed by the benediction, which I pronounced upon them, the triune blessing of the triune God. Usually, they lingered for a little subdued conversation, but this day they went out with unwonted speed, each grasping the hands of the old elder and the new, and each without a word.

In a moment I saw their purpose, and went out along with them, leaving those twain together, the father and the son. We heard no word; but we knew the best robe, and the ring, and the shoes, were there, and that God would dispense them in sacramental love.

It was not long till they came out again, life's fragrance about them as they came. I had lingered in the church.

"Just wait a minute," I said as they came in, "I left my notes in the vestry and I will be back immediately."

I had hardly reached the room when a light footfall was heard behind me. It was my daughter.

"Margaret! Is this you? I thought you had gone home. Where is your mother?" Lovely was her face and beautiful the light of joy upon it.

She did not seem to hear, but came straight on, and in a moment her arms were about my neck, and the brave heart told all its story in tears of utter gladness.

"Daughter mine," I whispered, "you will forgive" —but the gentle hand stopped the words.

"Where is your mother?" I asked again.

"Gone to the manse—they went together," and the sun shone through the rain—"I waited for you."

"Wait a moment," I said, "stay here a moment," —for I knew the ways of love.

I hurried without, and in the church I found the two men lingering for me.

"Mr. Blake, we will walk down to the manse together—Margaret is waiting for you in my room, Angus."

No maiden's fluttering form betrays the soul of love as doth a strong man's face. Ah me! as I looked on Angus's in that moment, I knew to whom my child belonged the most. But the broken em-

blems of Another's lay before me, and I made the lesser sacrifice with joy.

I watched his eager step, nor did he seek to control its pace. Swiftly he walked, and I could not forbear to follow with my eyes till he stood before the door.

A moment he paused, I know not why—then he slowly entered and the door was shut.

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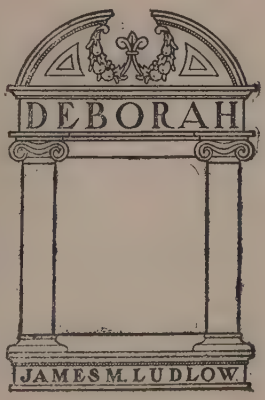

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